



Photo courtesy of Iowa NRCS

ADVANTAGES OF COVER CROPS

1. **Soil conservation** — Cover crops protect soil from erosion by reducing the impact of raindrops on soil particles.
2. **Water conservation** — Successive years of cover crops can increase soil organic matter, which increases water-holding capacity and infiltration.
3. **Nutrient cycling** — Organic matter from cover crops increases soil microbial populations and activity.
4. **Nutrient utilization** — Fall-planted cover crops can take up and use excess nitrogen left at the end of the growing season that otherwise might leach.
5. **Reduces compaction** — Cover crop roots penetrate compacted soil layers to allow for deeper movement of air and water into the soil profile.
6. **Increases infiltration** — Cover crops improve soil structure that leads to better water infiltration and less flooding, runoff and leaching.
7. **Grazing** — Cover crops can provide a forage source for livestock.
8. **Weed control** — Cover crops can suppress growth of weeds, especially winter annual weeds.
9. **Soil biodiversity** — Cover crop residues provide a food source for soil microbes and increase soil biological activity.
10. **Resiliency** — Cover crop fields may be more productive under drought conditions due to better water infiltration and water-holding capacity.

Sources: Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Midwest Cover Crop Council and United Soybean Board