

For Immediate Release: October 18, 2023

Contact: Doug Fasick: St. Joseph River Watershed Initiative Executive Director  
260-427-5235 or [Doug.Fasick@CityofFortWayne.org](mailto:Doug.Fasick@CityofFortWayne.org)

## **Healthy Soil = Healthy Farms: The Argument for Use of Cover Crops**

What is the best-case scenario for ensuring the success of large-scale farming operations and your home garden? Take care of your soil. The difference between struggling gardens and the lush green you see in model farms is the quality of the soil and how well it is managed.

Think of the soil beneath your feet as a living, ever changing organism. The interconnectedness and complexity of the organism means any disruption to the soil function, including tillage, pesticides, and bare soils, will decrease productivity and sustainability. However, extensive research has shown that we can grow crops and maintain healthy, productive soils that produce tasty, nutrient dense food, at less environmental cost.

Midwest farming operations whether large-scale corn-soybean systems or home gardens, are normally fallow from October to April. This is the same period when most water is moving through the system via snow melt and spring rains. But this does not have to lead to bare, exposed soil and the associated environmental damage from nutrient loss and sedimentation. There is a better way.

Dr. Jill Claperton, Soil Scientist and long-time proponent of soil health recommends, “keep your soil covered at all times.” Yes, you read that right, she means 24/7 - 365. “This promotes a healthy soil habitat and is vital to managing soil properties for long-term quality and sustainability.”

One way to achieve this goal is to use cover crops which are crops grown for the protection and enrichment of the soil at times of the year when we aren’t growing cash crops. To ensure that lush green success, they are used in conjunction with nutrient management, reduced or no tillage, pest management, and crop rotation.

Benefits of cover crops are far-reaching as they feed soil organisms, sequester carbon, trap and recycle nutrients, reduce erosion, reduce soil runoff, build soil organic matter, increase biological activity and diversity, reduce compaction, conserve soil moisture, control weeds, and suppress pests. All this leads to increased crop yields and decreased year-to-year variability making systems more resilient to the climate challenges we face.

The Midwest Cover Crop Council Selector Tool ([Midwestcovercrops.org](http://Midwestcovercrops.org)), is available to you to assist in selecting the right cover crops for your operation. The Decision Tools have been developed at state and county levels by a team of cover crop experts including In addition to this and other on-line tools, you can always seek answers and get assistance from your local Soil and Water Conservation District, Purdue Extension, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Growing crops in a sustainable manner that protects our precious natural resources is the responsibility of every farmer. When we have healthy soils, increased crop productivity, resilience to stresses from climate variations, and sustainable and healthy farmland, we all win!

---

---

---

The St. Joseph River Watershed Initiative serves a six-county area in Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. The Initiative works to develop partnerships that promote economical and environmentally compatible land uses that improve water quality in the 694,400-acre watershed. The Initiative's office is housed in Fort Wayne City Utilities at 200 E. Berry Street, Suite 250, Fort Wayne, Indiana.