



“My goal is to keep something growing, to put some value-added material and organic matter back into the soil to produce the next crop,” says Rich Bennett. “Our yields are comparable to others in the area, and we don’t have to use the high levels of fertilizer that we once did.”

His soybeans normally yield 40 to 60 bushels per acre, and his corn is in the 165-bushel range. By using cover crops, he figures he saves 30% on the cost of fuel, fertilizer and herbicide—the rye also acts as a weed barrier. There may be a slight yield decrease from a reduction in fertilizer, but it isn’t much.

“My yields may be 5% off from my neighbors’, but no more than that,” he says. “We still band fertilizer in the row, and the covers help release the bank of nutrients tied up in the soil. It’s a win-win.”

Rich adds another “win” to the mix by reducing tillage. “No-till soybeans into rye saves at least two passes with a disc or finishing tool, and that saves \$7 per acre in fuel costs,” he says. “There’s the added benefit of soil protected from wind and heavy rains, plus rainwater infiltration through the rye root structure through the soil, leaving no standing water.”

It’s easy to tell the difference in soils that have benefited from cover crops, according to Rich. Water may stand for many days in other fields, but for one day at the most where there are cover crops. There’s also a difference in the smell of the soils. >>

■ In spring, he drills Roundup Ready soybeans in seven-inch rows into the standing rye, using a drill with double-disc openers and wheel closers. He sprays 1 quart of Roundup per acre at planting to kill the rye, then another quart later in the season. While he used to add another herbicide at this second spraying, Rich says he can now normally skip it, because the rye has shaded out weeds.

■ Rich drills wheat into soybean stubble on some of his fields. Some type of cover, usually rye, may follow the wheat harvest, although lately he has been double-cropping soybeans after he takes the wheat. After Rich combines the double-cropped beans, it’s usually too late in the season to establish a cover crop, so he leaves the field as is and prepares it for corn planting the following spring.