**Cover Crops Can Improve Soil in “Prevented Planting” Fields**

*Indianapolis, IN* – June 26, 2015—Excessive rain and flooding has once again resulted in many fields that will go unplanted this year. Hoosier farmers who find themselves in this situation need to weigh not only their program and insurance options (*prevented planting*), but also the opportunities to increase long-term productivity from this difficult situation.

Barry Fisher, State Soil Health Specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service encourages farmers to consider planting cover crops as an alternative.

“The benefits of planting a cover crop now are vast and will lead to improved soil health,” said Fisher. “An important soil health concept is to ensure there is green vegetation and growing roots at all times of the year. Cover crops will fix and/or hold onto unused nitrogen and other nutrients, build organic matter, control weeds, control erosion and/or improve soil health during the remainder of the season.”

The potential of a payment for prevented planting, along with the possibility of an improved yield following a full season "green manure" crop may provide some economic rebound. Farmers should check first check with their crop insurance agent and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) office about planting or harvest restrictions for cover crops before making a decision.

So how can cover crops help? Fisher explains as excessive rainfall runoff or flood waters cut across unprotected fields it carries away the top soil, leaving erosion and scouring. On the other hand, when fields are saturated for long periods the soil will lose important soil organisms. With either of these situations, soil health is lost or severely impacted. A tilled, bare, fallow field will lose even more carbon, nitrogen and organic matter. Tilled fields will be subject to erosion, compaction and crusting. Seeding a cover crop instead of tilling the soil will help protect the soil from further sun, wind and water damage and help to rebuild topsoil.

Fisher encourages farmers to contact their NRCS District Conservationist to explore options before making a decision that requires tillage.

Keeping your soil healthy under these wet conditions is challenging, but NRCS can help farmers with recommendations when planting a crop is not possible. Contact your local USDA NRCS office today <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.

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