LASA
Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance

Winter 2023
lafayetteagstewardship.org

Understanding the Practice 'Planting Green' for Alfalfa Establishment

By Josh Kamps, Extension Crops and Soils- Grant, Green, Iowa, and Lafayette

Agriculture has a long tradition of associating the color of paint with each farmer's preferred tractor brand. Even within a certain color hue multiple brands are represented, for example the hue of green is associated with John Deere, Oliver, Deutz-Fahr, Fendt and Claas tractors. We have all heard the jokes, song refrains and directed ridicule based on the color of paint which represents a particular tractor brand. The term 'planting green' is not describing the paint color of the tractor in the field. Rather, this term defines the action taking place in the field. 'Planting green' is planting the seed of an intended cash crop directly into a green and growing cover crop. In Wisconsin, a popular cover crop option used for this practice is winter cereal rye.

Table 2. First cutting alfalfa average treatment data, 7-7-2022

Promised Land Farm, Lafayette Co. Treatments	DM Yield tons/acre	DM %	Moisture %	CP %	RFV points	NDF %	ADF %
1- No rye + no-till + G	2.45	28	72	21.24	160.07	37.06	32.31
2- Rye + no-till + FH + NG	2.47	29	71	18.80	135.06	44.50	31.29
3- Rye + no-till + G	2.31	29	71	23.40	151.01	39.25	32.40
4- Rye + spring tillage + G	2.14	30	70	20.89	143.63	39.62	35.62

G= glyphosate, FH= forage harvest, NG= no glyphosate

Extension and UW-Nutrient and Pest Management along with local collaborators designed, established and evaluated the practice of establishing alfalfa by 'planting green' with winter cereal rye to better understand the level of stand establishment, yield and forage quality for this practice. The management practices studied include no-till vs. tillage, cover crop vs. no cover crop and herbicide vs. forage harvest cover crop termination. Fall planted cereal rye was followed by spring planted glyphosate tolerant alfalfa into the living cereal rye.

Early terminated treatments of rye biomass with herbicide yielded .5-ton dry matter of biomass per acre. Late terminated treatments of rye biomass with forage harvest yielded 1-ton dry matter of biomass per acre. The first cutting of alfalfa at the Lafayette County plot was harvested at the mid-bloom maturity stage. Table 2 (above) lists the average treatment data for the first cutting of alfalfa. This data set implies that tradeoffs for each management practice exist with the first crop of alfalfa new seeding. Fall alfalfa stand assessment indicated

(continued on page 2)

Building knowledge about Wisconsin's cover crops

By Dan Smith, UW-Madison NPM Program, Ricardo Costa, The Nature Conservancy, and Mrill Ingram, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

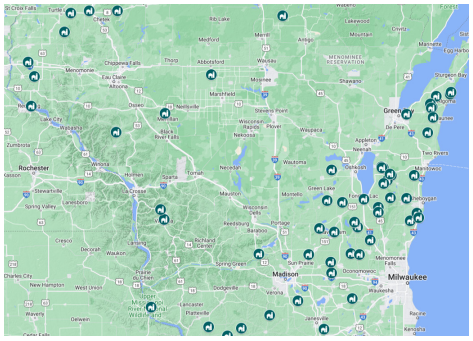
Thanks to all our collaborating farmers who responded to an online survey about their cover cropping practices and allowed us to collect cover crop samples at the end of the growing season. We recently finished our biomass sampling from around the state and have closed our online survey.

Our next steps include mailing out honorariums over the next few weeks to participants and beginning to crunch through our data. We'll have a full research report by early spring. We'll also share individual information about biomass yield, nutrient analysis and forage quality in the early spring.

Biomass samples are in the dryer now, but forage quality analysis is taking a while at the lab.

Around Wisconsin, 55 farmers participated from at least 33 counties. Seventeen participants were repeats from our previous seasons.

Driving around the state for this third year of collecting biomass samples, we saw less cover crops than in the past in the southern



parts of the state, likely due to dry conditions and a longer harvest season. However, other areas east of Lake Winnebago had timely rains and cover crops looked good.

Again, we deeply appreciate all the farmers who worked with us, as well as the financial and collaborative support from the Wisconsin chapter of The Nature Conservancy and the Wisconsin Natural Resources and Conservation Service. We also want to thank Jamie Patton and Dan Marzu of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Nutrient and Pest Management Program for helping us collect samples. More results will be out soon, but in the meantime, here's a quick peak at our results:

Farmers' experience with cover crops was distributed, with 40% of respondents having 4-6 years of experience.

The number of acres under cover crops by each respondent ranged from under 100 to over 2,500.

Regarding the percentage of each farm under cover crops, numbers ranged from under 10% to 100%. Thirteen respondents have between 25-50% of their farms in cover crops, while nine respondents have 100% acres in cover crops.

Multiple farmers mentioned the challenges of planting cover crops after corn, especially when corn is harvested late in the season.

Stay tuned for details on cover crop species, timing, nutrient management and more. For more on us and our work, please visit our webpage (https://cias.wisc.edu/our-work/farming-systems/cover-crops/ccrop/).

If you're interested in potentially joining us for the 2023 season, reach out to Ricardo.

(continued from page 1)

maximum yield potential for the first full production year across all treatments as the presence of a rye cover crop did not appear to affect stand establishment in 2022.

Based on infield observations of 'planting green' and the data collected during year one of this study, the following list shares some of the positive and negative effects of this practice.

1. Positive- reduced risk of soil erosion during early spring compared to traditional alfalfa establishment
2. Positive- cover crop biomass is an additional feed source
3. Positive- soil carrying capacity increases and risk of field rutting during the seeding year decreases
4. Negative- requires alfalfa seeding field identification 6 months in advance
5. Negative- forage quality and yield penalty for the first alfalfa crop of the seeding year

Thank you to the 2022 collaborators for your support! The collaborators include LASA, Curt and Debbie Miller, Reddy Ag/ Ross Soil Service, Rockie Miller, Tom Douglas Family, Gretchen Kamps and Dan Smith.

The 'planting green' alfalfa establishment study is scheduled again for 2023 in Lafayette County and at the Lancaster Research Station. Learn additional information about this practice during a presentation at the 2023 LASA Annual Meeting.

Many to thank this year

By Jim Winn, LASA president

As the year 2022 is coming to an end, I believe it's time to thank everyone who helps our group flourish. What comes to my mind first is our dedicated farmers who make up LASA. It gives me great pleasure to sit at our board meetings and listen to the interaction we have between our farmers when we think of new and improved ways for our members to bring value to our group. I believe it's the number one motivator for all our groups in Wisconsin. Put like-minded farmers in a room and let the conversations begin.

This wouldn't happen without the direction from our good friends at Farmers for Sustainable Food. We can't thank you enough. TNC is another friend of our group that is always looking at new ways to provide more funds for our group to try new experiments. With their help, we have grown membership the past couple of years. Our county UW Extension agent, Josh Kamps along with Dennis Busch and Andrew Cartmill from UW Platteville is very valuable with their input for our group also. Of course, without the help of DATCP, we would not exist. So, thank you very much for your support. There are many more, but I'd like to give a snapshot of what we accomplished as a group in 2022.

We had our annual meeting in February. Paul Mitchell from UW Extension presented on how strong 2021 was for area farmers and how nutrient management practices enables farmers to work together so we can improve water quality. It was a great presentation. In March, members of LASA partnered with our friends from Grande to produce a video showcasing the national award we received the previous year. We also enjoy working with other farmer-led groups in Wisconsin, so we jumped at the opportunity to tour Jeff Endres's Berryridge Farm LLC in Dane county where he gave us a tour of his composting operation for new ways of handling manure. In May, Mike Berget, a LASA member, had a field day at his farm to show how he planted into green cover crops, and Dennis Busch from UW Platteville displayed a rain simulator. In July, LASA had our summer picnic at the General Store in Wiota. We had a great crowd, and everyone enjoyed the meal provided by Dan and Mary. Thanks to Dan and Mary for all you do for our group. You're a huge asset to us. Also in July, Josh Kamps held a Hot Cover Crop field day at the USDA building. He demonstrated different cover crops he planted in a small plot right in the city of Darlington, proving we don't need a farm to host an educational event.

Wilson Organic Farms was the site for our annual summer field day this year. The Wilson family gave us an in depth view on how they manage their organic operation and how long they have been organic. Very interesting conversation. Josh Kamps had a soil pit demonstration, and Kory Stalsberg from Southwest Tech presented a rain simulator demo. I've seen lots of rain simulators the last couple of years, but they're fascinating to watch. I always learn something new. A very worthwhile day at Wilson's. We followed up with a couple small field days this fall. We had a great year and look forward to next year.

We are already busy working on our annual meeting which is scheduled for March 1, we look forward to making 2023 our best year yet. I invite anyone who reads this newsletter to please reach out to me or any of our board members with ideas you would like to see us explore or adopt. If you like to host a field day at your farm we would love to hear from you. We're always looking for new ideas.

In closing, I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and I hope everyone enjoys the holiday season.

Jim

Introducing Shawn

Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative announced the hiring of Shawn Wesener as a data collection specialist to work on the cooperative's sustainability programs.

Wesener has a professional background in agriculture and public planning. As a certified crop adviser, he most recently served as a precision agriculture specialist for Country Visions Cooperative, based in Brillion, Wis.

At Edge, Wesener will support members in their conservation efforts by working directly with farmers and crop advisers to capture the data needed to drive sustainability projects and support continuous improvement.

His work will align with Farmers for Sustainable Food, a nonprofit organization of food system partners that Edge helped establish.

"Shawn brings a unique range of skills and experiences in customer data, agricultural software programs, compliance review and farmer engagement," Tim Trotter, CEO of Edge and Farmers for Sustainable Food, said.

"I am excited to be part of the sustainability initiatives Edge supports through Farmers for Sustainable Food," Wesener said. "The members are clearly committed to field practices that protect soil and water quality while also remaining profitable. Data holds the key to connecting that work to customers who want to know that the food they buy is responsibly produced."

The data collection specialist position is a new one for Edge, which supports a growing number of farmer-led watershed conservation groups that implement and promote practices to build soil health, protect water quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Steve Carpenter: Caring for Family, Community and the Land

By The Nature Conservancy for LASA

For Steve Carpenter, a third-generation dairy farmer near Darlington in Lafayette County, it's all about family—staying close, taking care of the land and passing those values on to the next generation.

"When Lisa and I started at Redrock View Farms in 1985, it was a small operation," Steve comments. "We've been able to really grow it and bring our children in to farm with us, which is something we both wanted. Being able to work with them side-by-side every day, and now having our grandchildren around, brings us so much joy."

Today, Steve, Lisa and their three sons, Cody, Colton and Carson, along with seven employees, milk 600 cows and farm 2,000 acres of corn, alfalfa and soybeans. Their daughter, Cora, graduated from Iowa State University in agricultural communications and is also pursuing a career in agriculture.

The family has always been involved in their community, participating and taking leadership roles in 4-H and FFA, the Lafayette County and state fairs and the annual county dairy breakfasts. But if you ask Steve what he's most proud of, hands down it's Day @ the Dairy, which he founded with three other dairy farms. Every fourth grader in Lafayette County is invited to visit the host farm to learn about and experience life on a dairy farm, from milking cows to tasting cheese and ice cream.

Forming a farmer-led group in Lafayette County

Steve has been a dairy farmer his entire life, starting as a boy milking cows at both his grandparents' and parents' farms. Like all farmers, he's learned to deal with multiple challenges, from low milk prices and higher fuel and fertilizer costs to immigration policies and more extreme weather conditions.

Steve Carpenter, co-owner of Redrock View Farms

In recent years, environmental issues, including water-quality protection, have become top of mind for Steve. In 2017, he and a handful of farmers in Lafayette County, led by Jim Winn, owner of Cottonwood Dairy in Wiota, came together to form the Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance (LASA). The purpose of the group is to work together to protect and improve their soil, water quality and environment by identifying, sharing and promoting conservation practices on their farms. Steve is the group's vice-president.

One of LASA's early actions was to participate in and help fund a study to test the water from hundreds of wells in Grant, Iowa and Lafayette counties to determine whether drinking water contamination issues exist, and if so, what is causing the contamination.

"We live in an area of the state with a lot of karst, and people in our county are worried about water quality," says Steve. "Jim had been watching Yahara Pride Farms and Peninsula Pride Farms and the changes those farmers were making to their farming practices to improve their soil and protect their water. He invited me and a few other farmers to join him in forming our own group and taking a proactive approach to conservation."

LASA started small with seven farms, but it has grown. Today, 35 farmers who raise 92,565 dairy cows, beef cattle and pigs and who farm about 59,300 acres are involved in the group.

LASA is supported by Farmers for Sustainable Food and The Nature Conservancy, who assist with outreach and event planning, helping farmers track the outcomes of their conservation practices and providing incentive funds to farmers who want to try new practices, such as cover crops and reduced tillage. The group also receives generous support from local and state businesses.

For Steve and Lisa Carpenter, their sons, Cody, Colton, and Carson, and their daughter, Cora, Redrock View Farms is a family affair. © Patrick Flood Photography LLC

(continued from page 4)

"Farming is very challenging, and TNC is pleased to be able to support the efforts of Steve and other LASA farmers to find solutions that improve water quality and soil health and address climate change while sustaining their livelihoods and Wisconsin's dairy economy," says Steve Richter, TNC's Wisconsin agriculture strategy director.

Conservation at Redrock View Farms

Carpenter is quick to say that he's new in his journey using cover crops, reduced tillage and other conservation practices. It's not something his parents or grandparents did.

"I'm not where I want to be yet," he says. "I've definitely had some challenges with no-till, for example, due to soil compaction. It doesn't mean I can't do it. I just need to try different ways to do it."

One of the things Steve is trying on the fields where he has compaction issues is vertical tillage. This type of tillage reduces disturbance to the soil by cutting into it vertically rather than pulling or dragging the blades through the soil. Most of the residue from the previous year's crop is still in place after one pass through the field, reducing erosion and making it easier to plant the next season's crop.

Steve is also using cover crops like barley on some fields and no-tilling into that. On other fields, he's planting rye in the fall and then spreading manure onto it. The rye holds the soil in place, uses the nitrogen from the manure, adds organic matter and helps hold moisture in the soil.

Steve is also experimenting with nitrogen applications on his farm, matching the rate, timing and source of fertilizer to what the plants need. And he's starting to see the benefits.

"I've been doing this for the past four years, and our yields have improved every year," he comments.

Finally, along with several other LASA members, Steve is participating in a five-year pilot study with Farmers for Sustainable Food, TNC, dairy processing and retail companies, and many other partners to create a framework that other farmers in Wisconsin and nationwide can use to establish conservation programs on their farms and document the environmental and economic impacts.

"The Carpenters and others in Steve's group are setting an example through their commitment to trying new practices and measuring tangible effects," Lauren Brey, managing director of Farmers for Sustainable Food, says. "Through this new framework, that example can be exported far beyond this one watershed. The goal is for widespread success throughout the supply chain, and we're already seeing interest from farmers and partners elsewhere."

Learning from the experiences of others

Steve says the biggest benefit of LASA has been learning from other farmers.

"I learn something from other farmers at every LASA meeting and field day," he says. "I see what people are trying, listen to how they're doing it and learn from their successes and their mistakes."

Spending time with family, giving back to his community and running Redrock View Farms keep Steve busy. If you ask him what motivates him to add LASA, the pilot study and utilizing conservation practices to his already full plate, he talks about the future.

"It's about taking pride in and being good stewards of the land," he says, "and passing that onto my kids. I want them to feel the same way I do about taking care of the land for their kids and grandkids."

LASA
Lafayette Ag Stewardship Alliance

5741 Springbrook Rd
South Wayne, WI 53587

LASA Annual Meeting

Mark your calendars for March 1, 2023

Join us in person to hear about LASA's accomplishments from the past year and plans for 2023.

When: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Wednesday, March 1
Where: Multi-purpose building, Darlington
Agenda: Rodrigo Werle, pest management results through cover cropping; Shawn Wesener, 2022 conservation outcomes; Doug Thomas, pilot project update; Josh Kamps and Ryan Temperly, cover crops and nutrient management.

Watch your email and check lafayetteagstewardship.org > Events for full details.