

Cover Crop Mixtures Field Day

Summary: Montana State University is hosting a field day on cover crop mixtures as a partial replacement of fallow in rain-fed cropping systems.

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To: News-dailies, News-weeklies, AgMedia, News-local, News-tv, News-radio, MSU-All-News, News-internal, NatResourcesNonmedia, Producers, Web. From Sara Adlington, (406) 994-4602

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From MSU News Service

BOZEMAN – Mixed species cover crops, or “cover crop cocktails,” are the focus of a new study by researchers at Montana State University and will be the topic of a field day on June 14 from 10 a.m. to noon, near Amsterdam, Montana. The three-year study, funded by USDA Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), is a collaborative project with Montana producers to look at cover crop mixtures as a partial replacement of fallow in rain-fed cropping systems. The project will determine how combinations of plants, rather than single species cover crops, influence cover crop yield, soil quality, water availability and subsequent wheat yield and quality.

“We planted the cover crop mixtures this spring, and with cooperative weather, should have healthy stands by mid-June,” said Clain Jones, Extension Soil Fertility specialist in the Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences at Montana State University. Seed mixes being tested contain two, six, or eight species from various “functional groups” and will be compared against fallow and a single-species legume cover crop. The functional groups were selected to address soil quality issues specific to farming in the northern Great Plains. They include species that fix nitrogen to reduce nitrogen fertilizer inputs, provide ground cover to reduce weed establishment and evaporation, have deep tap roots to minimize compaction and move nutrients upwards, or have fibrous and extensive root systems to add soil carbon and promote aggregation. Jones said the study is designed to help provide information on plant functional groups to help farmers when selecting cover crop seed mixtures.

The field day will be on Carl Vandermolén’s farm, one of several farms assisting with this study. It is sponsored by the Montana State University Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences and the Gallatin Conservation District. Researchers Clain Jones, Susan Tallman and Perry Miller, all from Montana State University, will present the benefits and challenges of cover crops and describe their study. Carl Vandermolén will discuss his cover crop philosophy and experiences. They will all be available for questions during and after their presentations, so bring your curiosity and questions. Refreshments will be provided by the

Gallatin Conservation District. The field day is free and open to the public, however, please RSVP by Monday, June 11, 2012, to Marcie at (406) 522-4011. For a link to directions to the field day location, see <http://landresources.montana.edu/soilfertility/covercrops.html>. For more information about the field day or the study, contact Clain Jones at (406) 994-6076 or clainj@montana.edu.