

Cover Crop Incentive Program available through Kittson SWCD

By Anna Jauhola

Farmers who want to prevent soil erosion, create better soil health or extend the grazing season can take advantage of the Cover Crop Incentive Program.

The Kittson Soil and Water Conservation District provides \$15 per acre for a single species cover crop mix or \$40 per acre for a multi-

species cover crop mix, said Justin Muller, district technician.

"We're actively taking contracts," he said. "The program is open year round."

Farmers who participate must commit to a 20-acre minimum and the cap is 80 acres. This cost-share program provides this money as a break-even opportunity for farmers

to pay for the seed.

"Many do this in the spring for plant protection and erosion protection," Muller said. "It gets windy in the spring and you see that dirt blowing around. They try to get some cover out there before the actual row crops get up."

Farmers who have participated in the program before typically seed their row crops and then aerial apply the cover crop.

Muller said typically sugar beet farmers apply oats or barley, something that easily germinates and grows quickly.

"Then it grows 4 to 5 inches and provides enough cover for the beets so they don't get sandblasted by moving dirt," Muller said. "It also helps keep some of the soil from blowing around. Then they spray out the cover crop with a regular herbicide application."

For those who plant corn, typically a multi-species aerial application is best. The farmer then leaves that crop in the ground throughout the growing season and when they've harvested the corn, they turn their cattle out to the fields for extended grazing.

"This option also creates more or-

ganic matter, which is the building block for soil," Muller said.

Keeping the cover crop in the ground develops better nutrient cycles for the row crop as it's growing, provides more infiltration and less runoff. Also by planting a cover crop, farmers may see fewer weeds in the acreage.

"What we're after is getting these guys' feet wet in the program," Muller said. "It's not a make or break thing with them. No one wants to spend extra money if they think it's going to compromise their crop. So 80 acres for a cap is a good starting spot, we thought."

The prices are a little lower also because the program, in its beginning, doesn't have a lot of money to spread around.

"But it provides enough benefit across the county," Muller said. "It covers the cost to get the seed on the ground."

Farmers interested in taking part in the Cover Crop Incentive Program need only stop at the SWCD office at the Kittson County Courthouse lower level in Hallock or call at 843-2619, ext. 3.

Agriculture and the economy

Many people rely on the agriculture industry for their foods, but think little of the impact that agriculture has on the larger economy. However, data indicates that agriculture can serve a significant role in the process of solidifying the economy of a country, particularly developing nations. Agriculture also can contribute to the economic prosperity of advanced countries. IPP Media points out that the economic history of many developed countries indicates that agricultural prosperity contributed heavily to their economic advancement. When the basic food supply is strong, the national economy can be strong as well. Particularly in the early days of the United States, farming held a crucial place in establishing the American economy and culture, and still shapes the country today. Many states find that farming and other agricultural pursuits contribute much to the local and national economy. For example, new research from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-Extension show that agriculture is a powerful economic force in Wisconsin. Agricultural businesses help generate more than \$83 billion in activity and have created more than 400,000 jobs in that state. The public should not disregard how strong a factor agriculture can be in establishing a strong economic environment. Safeguarding agricultural jobs and the agricultural industry is crucial to economic stability.



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