



Under Cover

December 2015 Snapshots



A new color will soon be taking over post-harvest crop fields in southeastern Minnesota: Green! This part of our state is famous for its beautiful farms, rolling hills, caves and dramatic bluffs and valleys. What makes this area beautiful also presents challenges for water quality. Soil erosion from highly erodible land in combination with conventional farming practices and proximity to groundwater via karst topography pollutes ground and surface waters. However, the use of cover crops has been found to slow erosion, improve soil health, enhance water availability, smother weeds, help control pests and diseases and increase biodiversity. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is embarking on a project that aims to promote the use of cover crops in southeastern Minnesota through training and education.

This project recently received \$253,000 provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). The Trust Fund is a permanent fund constitutionally established by the citizens of Minnesota to assist in the protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources. This project aims to promote the use of cover crops in southeastern Minnesota through training and education.



Cover crops like this winter rye in Fillmore County will help slow erosion and improve soil health.

In addition to an overall goal of promoting cover crop use in a sensitive region, the project has obtained a rainfall simulator to provide on-farm technical training, education and outreach. BWSR will be partnering with the University of Minnesota Forever Green Initiative, University of Minnesota Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Southeast Minnesota Technical Service Area 7 Joint Powers Board staff to lead 6 workshops and 9 field days on cover crop management techniques and other soil health best management practices.

The project will also conduct a cover crop economic study for southeastern Minnesota. Dr. William Lazarus, an economics professor with the University of Minnesota, will provide real data to help producers make informed decisions about cover crops. In addition, the project will establish 700 acres of cover crop demonstration sites in a variety of landscapes and agricultural settings to model cover crop use.

The first workshop for the project will be held in early 2016 and cover crop demonstration sites are on track to be established by the end of 2016.