

Innovative No-Till: Using Multi-Species Cover Crops to Improve Soil Health



By Jay Fuhrer, NRCS – Bismarck, North Dakota and Susan Tallman, NCAT



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Speakers



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www.attra.ncat.org

This webinar is being recorded and will be posted to the ATTRA website, www.attra.ncat.org



Cover Crops: Designing for what you don't have!



Photo: Jon Stika, NRCS

Resource Concerns:

- Provide crop diversity
- Provide soil surface armor
- Build soil aggregates
- Improve the water cycle
- Integrated Pest Management
- Build soil organic matter



Cover Crops: Designing for what you don't have!



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Resource Concerns (*continued*):

- Promote nutrient cycling
- Enhance pollinators
- Adjust carbon/nitrogen ratios
- Provide wildlife food & shelter
- Integrate livestock



Four Case Studies on Improving Soil Health with Cover Crop Combinations

Brown's Ranch



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Richter Farms



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Black Leg Ranch



Photo: Joshua Dukart, BCSCD

Menoken Farm



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Case Study 1



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Brown's Ranch - Gabe and Paul Brown

- Provide crop diversity
- Build soil organic matter
- Promote nutrient cycling
- Adjust C/N ratio
- Integrate livestock



The Answer: Imitate Native Rangeland



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Diversity in the Cropping System



Warm-Season Grass



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Warm-Season Broadleaf



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Diversity in the Cropping System



Cool-Season Grass



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Cool-Season Broadleaf



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Diversity — Crop Types

Warm-Season Broadleaf



Alfalfa

Buckwheat

Chickpea

Amaranth

Cowpea

Soybean

Safflower

Sunflower

Warm-Season Grasses



Corn

Proso Millet

Pearl Millet

Sorghum

Sudan



Diversity — Crop Types (continued)

Cool-Season Broadleafs



Canola

Turnip

Crambe

Pasja

Flax

Pea

Lentils

Lupin

Radish

Mustard

Forage Canola

Red Clover

Sweet Clover

Cool-Season Grasses



Barley

Durum Wheat

Oats

Spring Wheat

Winter Rye

Winter Triticale

Winter Wheat



Brown's Ranch Annual Crops and Cover Crops

Cool-Season Grass

Barley
Wheat
Oats



Cool-Season Broadleaf

Canola
Pea
Turnip
Radish
Lentil

Hairy Vetch
Pasja
Red Clover
Sweet Clover



Warm-Season Grass

Millet
Sorghum
Sudan
Corn



Warm-Season Broadleaf

Alfalfa
Sunflower
Sugar Beets
Buckwheat
Cowpea



Soil Organic Matter (SOM)

- Cover Crops provide a continual live root to harvest additional sunlight



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Upward Trend



- 1993..... 1.7 to 2.0%
- Present 3.7 to 4.3%



Nutrient Cycling ~ Carbon/Nitrogen Ratios

Soil Microorganisms, Bacteria *	5/1
SOM, Mollisol Ap horizon *	11/1
Young Alfalfa Hay *	13/1
Rotted barnyard manure *	20/1
Mature Alfalfa Hay *	25/1
Protozoa **	30/1
Corn Stover *	57/1
Wheat Straw *	80/1
Newspaper *	120/1
Deciduous Wood **	300/1

Source:

* *The Nature and Properties of Soils, Fourteenth Edition. Dr. Nyle C. Brady and Dr. Ray R. Weil*

** *Dr. Elaine R. Ingham, Soil Food Web*





Warm-Season Cocktail



Photo: Jon Stika, NRCS

- Cowpea..... 10 lbs
- Soybean 20 lbs
- Pearl Millet..... 4 lbs
- Proso Millet..... 4 lbs
- Radish..... 2 lbs
- Turnip..... 1 lb
- Sunflower..... 10 lbs
- Buckwheat..... 10 lbs





Cool-Season Cocktail



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Seeded end of April 2009

No commercial fertilizer applied

- Oat 45 lbs
- Forage Pea 30 lbs
- Hairy Vetch 10 lbs
- Turnip 1 lb
- Radish 1 lb
- Red Clover 1 lb



Brown's Ranch

— Same Field —



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

July 1, 2009

- Corn planted into last year's cover crop residue



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

July 16, 2009

- Rapid residue decomposition



Spring 2008



Photo: Gabe Brown, BCSCD

- Planting into grazed Cowpea/Millet
- Invisible Planting



Livestock Integration



Photo: Joshua Dukart, BCSCD



Mob Grazing on Cropland



Cool-Season Cover Crop Combination

- 2 acres per day
- 6 moves per day
- 327 yearlings

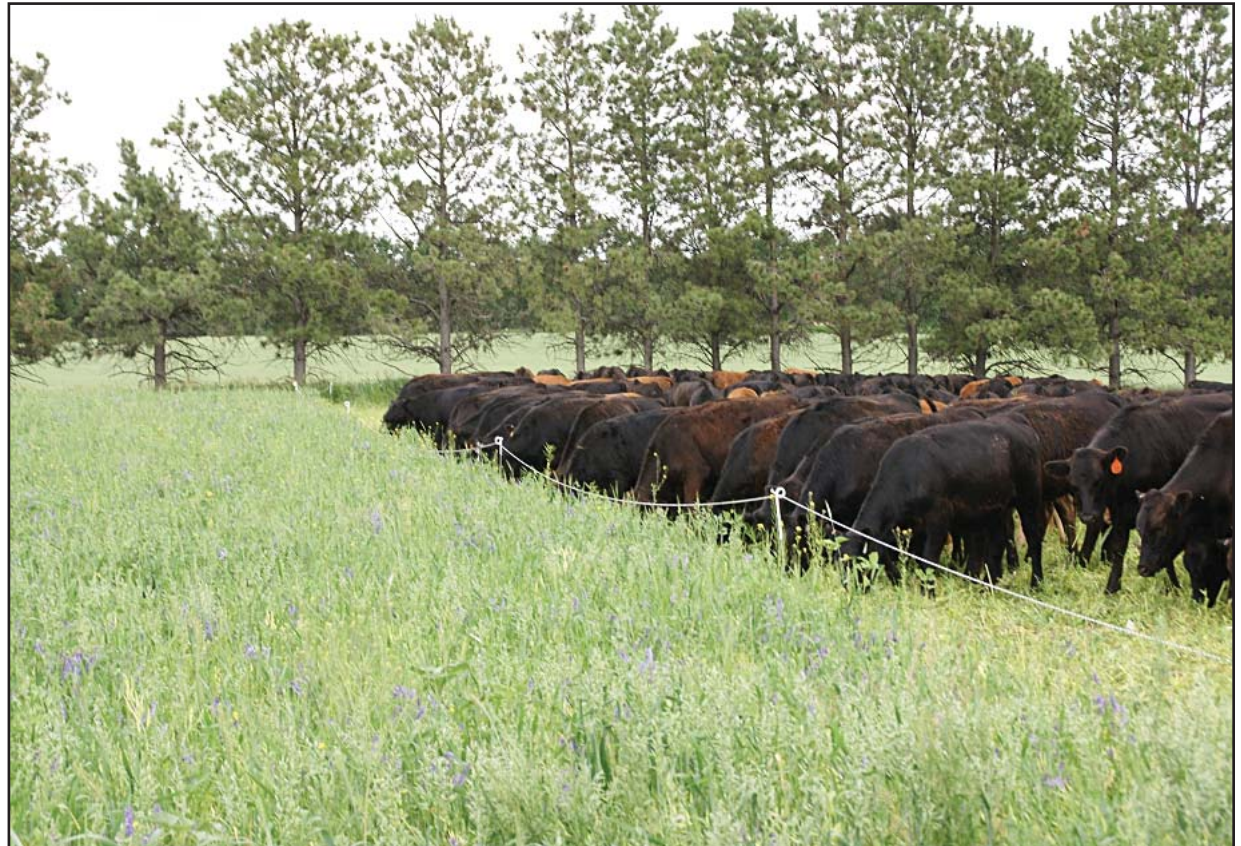


Photo: Gabe Brown, BCSCD



Soil Armor After Mob Grazing



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Case Study 2



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Richter Farms - Marlyn and Patrick Richter

- Provide soil surface armor
- Build soil aggregates
- Improve the water cycle
- Integrated Pest Management
- Build soil organic matter
- Integrate livestock



Cover Crop Seeded After an Early Harvest



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Field Pea



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Winter Triticale



Cover Crop Cocktail

- Millet 8 lbs WS Grass 
- Cowpea 10 lbs WS Broadleaf 
- Soybean 15 lbs WS Broadleaf 
- Turnip ½ lb CS Broadleaf 
- Oilseed Radish 1 lb CS Broadleaf 
- Sunflower 1 lb WS Broadleaf 
- Sweet Clover 1 lb CS Broadleaf 



NCAT

Ready to Graze 10/1/2007



Photo: Joshua Dukart, BCSCD



141 Pair - Turned In 10/1/07; Turned Out 10/17/07



Photo: Joshua Dukart, BCSCD



Dual Feeding System: Soil Biology and Livestock



Photo: Joshua Dukart, BCSCD



What Do They Weigh?

Bacteria	2,000 - 2,500 lbs/ac
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Fungi	1000 - 15,000 lbs/ac
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Protozoa	20 - 300 lbs/ac
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Nematodes	10 - 300 lbs/ac
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Sources:

The Nature and Properties of Soils, Fourteenth Edition.

Dr. Nyle C. Brady and Dr. Ray R. Weil

Soil Biology Primer. Dr. Elaine R. Ingham



52 lbs Average Gain/Calf ~ 3.1 lbs Average Daily Gain/Calf



Photo: Kenneth Miller, BCSCD



Net Profit of Grazing Cover Crops

Gross Income per acre	=	\$111.00
Expense per acre	=	\$ 45.00
Net Income per acre	=	\$66.00

- Value of increased recovery time on Native Rangeland?
- Value of Improved Soil Health?



No Wind Erosion on the Cover Crop Field



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Photo: Richard Webb, NRCS

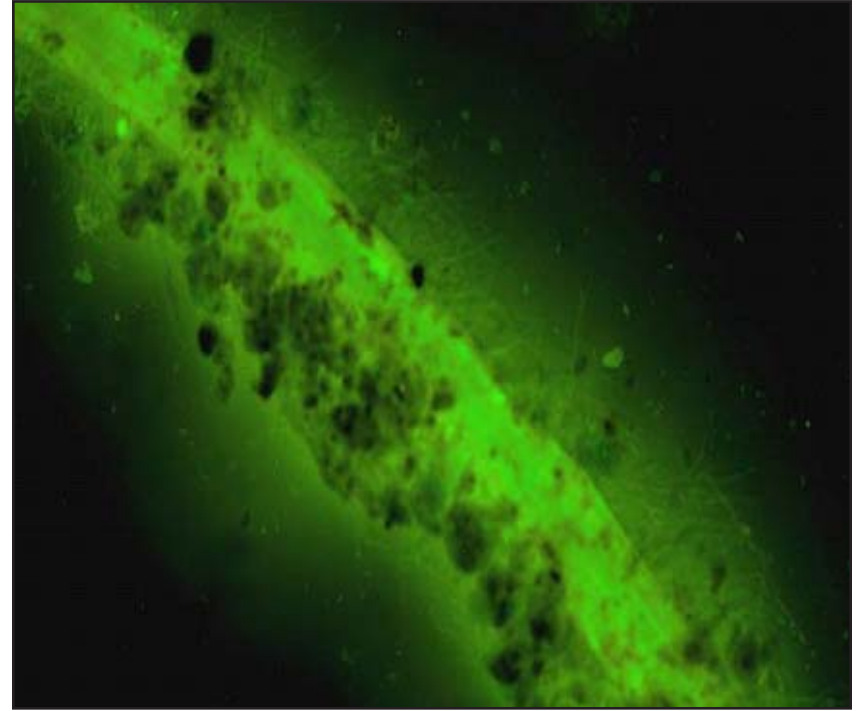


Soil Samples



- Soil aggregates on a millet root

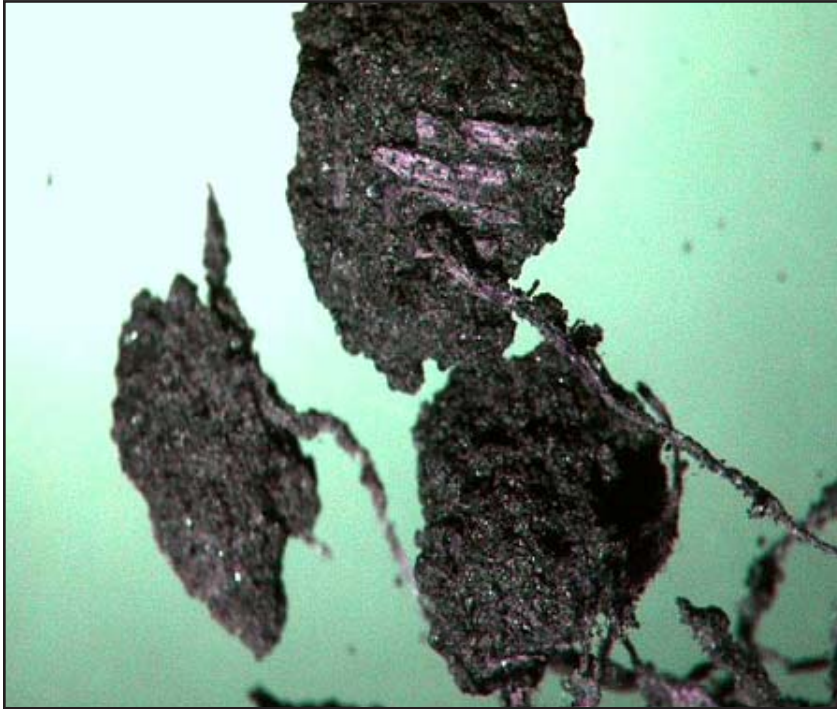
Dr. Kris Nichols, Microbiologist, ARS, Mandan, ND



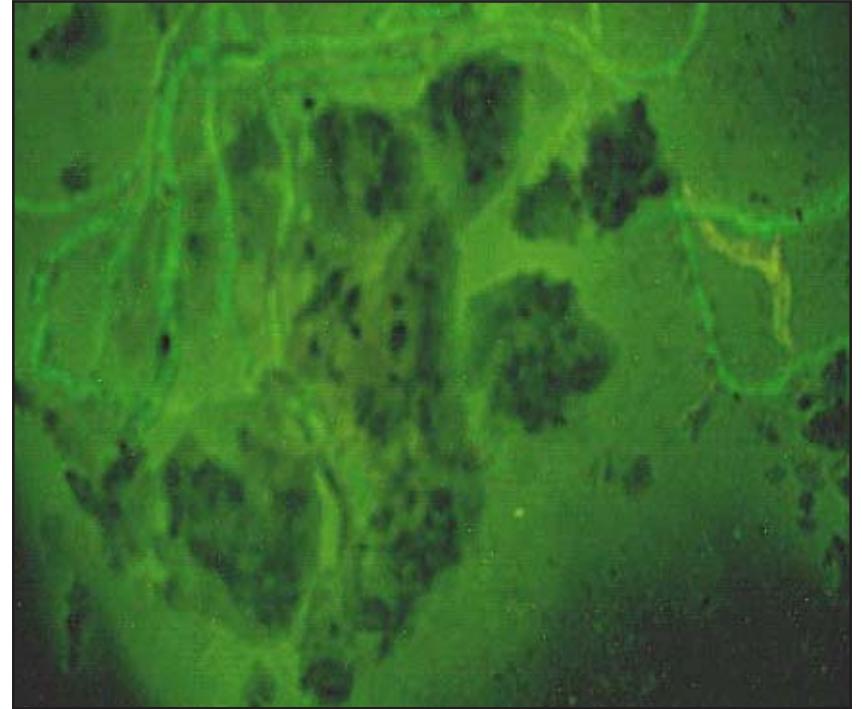
- Glomalin and hyphae show well with a green color in the lab



Soil Samples



- Enlarged soil aggregates



- Glomalin and hyphae

Dr. Kris Nichols, Microbiologist, ARS, Mandan, ND



NRCS Taking Soil Samples for Available Water Capacity

May 6, 2008



Photo: Joshua Dukart, BCSCD



Estimated Inches of Available Water ~ Sampled 5/6/08

Richter Farms, LLP
Menoken, North Dakota

Inches of Available Water *Parshall Fine Sandy Loam*

Depth (inches)	Cover Crop	No Cover Crop	AWC*
0-6	0.44	0.37	0.95
6-12	0.58	0.51	0.95
12-24	0.84	0.89	1.56
24-36	0.74	0.73	1.44
36-48	0.47	0.61	1.20
Total (0-48)	3.07	3.11	6.10

*** AWC - Available Water Capacity (Inches) @ Field Capacity**

Timeline

July 1, 2007	Harvested Field Peas
July 7, 2007	Planted Cover Crop Cocktail Mix
October 1-17, 2007	Grazed Cover Crop Cocktail Mix



Inches of Available Water



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

On May 6, 2008
(following the 2007 cover crop)

Summary

- No Cover Crop = 3.11 Inches
- Cover Crop = 3.07 Inches
- Difference = 0.04 Inches



Spring Weed Pressure



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Cover crop

- No cover crop



2007 Herbicide Expenses

Field	Treatment	Herbicide Applications After Pea Harvest Cost per application = \$12.00/ac		
		July 1×	Sept None	\$12.00
North	Cover Crop No Manure	July 1×	Sept None	\$12.00
Middle	No Cover Crop Manure	July 1×	Sept 1×	\$24.00
South	No Cover Crop No Manure	July 1×	Sept 1×	\$24.00



2008 Corn Herbicide Expense

Field	Treatment	2008 Corn Herbicide Cost per application = \$15.95/ac			
		May 1×	June 1×	None	
North	Cover Crop No Manure	May 1×	June 1×	None	\$31.90
Middle	No Cover Crop Manure	May 1×	June 1×	July 1×	\$47.85
South	No Cover Crop No Manure	May 1×	June 1×	July 1×	\$47.85



Resource Concern ~ Soil Organic Matter



Photo: Ronald Kessel, NRCS

- 2001 SOM Levels Averaged 1.5%
- Present Levels Average 2.5%



Soil Organic Matter and Available Water Capacity

Inches of Water/One Foot of Soil			
Percent SOM	Sand	Silt Loam	Silty Clay Loam
1	1.0	1.9	1.4
2	1.4	2.4	1.8
3	1.7	2.9	2.2
4	2.1	3.5	2.6
5	2.5	4.0	3.0

Berman Hudson

Journal Soil and Water Conservation 49(2) 189-194

March – April 1994

Summarized by:

Dr. Mark Liebig, ARS, Mandan, ND

Hal Weiser, Soil Scientist, NRCS, Bismarck, ND



Soil Organic Matter ~ Nutrient Bank Account

- 1.0% OM = 10,000 lbs Carbon, 1,000 lbs Nitrogen, 100 lbs Phosphorous, and 100 lbs of Sulfur.
- Mineralization Rate = 2-3% from Organic N to Inorganic N.
- Resulting in 20 to 30 lbs of useable N per acre.



Case Study 3



Photo: Joshua Dukart, BCSCD

Black Leg Ranch - Jerry, Jeremy, Jay and Jayce Doan

- Promote nutrient cycling
- Enhance wildlife
- Integrate livestock



Cover Crop Combination



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Seeded June 14-15
- Designed for nutrient cycling, wildlife and livestock integration
- Sprayed June 17th
- No commercial fertilizer
- Photo taken on June 25



Cover Crop Combination



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Pearl Millet 1 lb \$.74/lb
- Proso Millet 2 lbs \$.25/lb
- Sudan 4 lbs \$.45/lb
- Soybean 15 lbs \$.53/lb
- Cowpea 10 lbs \$1.13/lb
- Sunflower 1 lb \$4.00/lb
- Radish 2 lbs \$1.53/lb
- Turnip 1 lb \$1.53/lb
- Sweet Clover 1 lb \$1.40/lb
- Corn 1 lb \$1.25/lb



High-Leach-Potential Sands ~ July 20, 2010



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



July 20, 2010



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Soil Health Tour at Black Leg Ranch

September 16, 2010



Photo: Kenneth Miller, BCSCD



Soil Health Tour at Black Leg Ranch



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Strips were mowed for hunting access
- Steel fence posts were added
- After the hunting season is over the cow herd will be wintered here and strip grazed
- Multiple natural resource benefits: soil health, water quality, herd health, wildlife enhancement, and livestock integration



Case Study 4



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Menoken Farm

- Provide crop diversity
- Promote nutrient cycling
- Enhance pollinators
- Integrate livestock



Menoken Farm ~ Year 1, 2009



Foodweb Analysis Soil

Report prepared for:

NRCS North Dakota

Hal Weiser

218 2nd Ave SW

Jamestown, ND 58402 USA

hal.weiser@nd.usda.gov

Report Sent: 5/28/2009

Sample#: 01-107264 | Submission: 01-019543

Unique ID: 3

Plant: peas

Invoice Number: 3873

Sample Received: 5/19/2009

For interpretation of this report please contact:

Soil Foodweb Oregon

info@oregonfoodweb.com

(541) 752-5066

Consulting fees may apply

Organism Biomass Data	Dry Weight	Active Bacteria (µg/g)	Total Bacteria (µg/g)	Active Fungi (µg/g)	Total Fungi (µg/g)	Hyphal Diameter (µm)	Nematode detail (# per gram or # per mL) Classified by type and identified to genus. (If section is blank, no nematodes identified.)	
Results	0.860	30.1	1458	14.0	329	2.9	Bacterial Feeders Acrobes 0.88 Acrobeloides 0.34 Cephalobus 1.89 Heterocephalobus 0.17 Metatetratocephalus 0.17 Plectus 0.34 Rhabditidae 0.17 Fungal Feeders Thonus 0.34 Fungal/Root Feeders Aphelenchoides Foliar nematode 0.17 Aphelenchus 1.38 Ditylenchus Stem & Bulb nematode 0.69 Filenchus 0.34	
Comments	Above Range	Above range	Above range	In range	Above range			
Expected Range	Low 0.45 High 0.85	15 25	100 300	10 20	50 175			
		Protozoa (Numbers/g)			Total Nematodes #/g	Mycorrhizal Colonization (%)		
		Flagellates	Amoebae	Ciliates		ENDO	ECTO	
Results	1607	6674	37	7.99	Not Ordered	Not Ordered		
Comments	Low	High	Low	Low				
Expected Range	Low 5000 High	5000	50 100	20 30	40% 80%	40% 80%		
Organism Biomass Ratios	Total Fungi to Tot.Bacteria	Active to Total Fungi	Active to Total Bacteria	Active Fungi to Act.Bacteria	Plant Available N Supply (lbs/ac)	Actino Bacteria (µg/g)		
Results	0.23	0.04	0.02	0.46	25-50	3.83		
Comments	Low	Low	Low	Low				
Expected Range	Low 0.5 High 0.75	0.25 0.95	0.25 0.95	0.75 1.5				

1750 SW 3rd St Ste K Corvallis, OR 97333 USA

(541) 752-5066 | info@oregonfoodweb.com

www.oregonfoodweb.com

01-107264: Page 1 of 2



Menoken Farm ~ Year 1, 2009; Long Term No-Till



Soil Foodweb Analysis

Report prepared for:

Burleigh Co. Soil Conservation
Vicki Bailey
1511 E. Interstate Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58503-0560 US
(701) 250-4363
vicki.bailey@nd.nacdn.net

Report Sent: 07/29/2005

Sample#: 01-100984

Unique ID: GB1

Plant: Corn

Invoice Number: 8357

Sample Received: 07/14/2005

For interpretation of this report please contact:

Local Advisor: or regional lab
Soil Foodweb, Inc
info@soilfoodweb.com
(541) 752-5066

Consulting fees may apply

Organism Biomass Data	Dry Weight	Active Bacterial (µg/g)	Total Bacterial (µg/g)	Active Fungal (µg/g)	Total Fungal (µg/g)	Hyphal Diameter (µm)	Nematodes per Gram of Soil	
Results	0.850	46.3	405	5.24	274	2.5	Identification to genus	
Comments	To Wet	Excellent	Excellent	Low	Good			
Expected Range	Low	15	100	15	100			
	High	25	300	25	300			
		Protozoa Numbers/g			Total Nematodes #/g	Percent Mycorrhizal Colonization		
		Flagellates	Amoebae	Ciliates		ENDO	ECTO	
Results		178500	9736	331	4.45	31%	0%	
Comments		High	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	
Expected Range	Low	10000	10000	50	20	40%	40%	
	High			100	30	80%	80%	
Organism Biomass Ratios	Total Fungal to Total Bacterial	Active to Total Fungal	Active to Total Bacterial	Active Fungal to Active Bacterial	Plant Available N Supply			
Results	0.68	0.02	0.11	0.11	200+			
Comments	Low	Low	Low	Low				
Expected Range	Low	0.8	0.25	0.25				
	High	1.5	0.95	0.95				

Bacterial Feeders	
Acrobes	0.81
Acrobeloides	0.18
Cephalobus	0.45
Cervidellus	0.18
Rhabditidae	0.45
Fungal Feeders	
Eudorylamus	0.09
Fungal/Root Feeders	
Aphelenchoides	Foliar nematode 0.54
Aphelenchus	0.45
Ditylenchus	Stem & Bulb nematode 0.54
Filenchus	0.09

726 SW Wake Robin Avenue Corvallis, OR 97333 USA

(541) 752-5066 | info@soilfoodweb.com

www.soilfoodweb.com

01-100984; Page 1 of 2



Rolling Pea to Provide Armor ~ July 16, 2009



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Eight-way Cover Crop



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Seeded into rolled pea stubble
- Photo taken on August 18, 2009



No Commercial Fertilizer

September 4, 2010



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Sunflower 1 lb
- Soybean 15 lbs
- Cowpea 10 lbs
- Turnip 1 lb
- Radish 2 lbs
- Proso Millet 4 lbs
- Pearl Millet 4 lbs



Planting Corn into Last Year's Cover Crop Residue

May 20, 2010



Photo: Emily Bonilla, NRCS



Tissue Analysis Taken on July 7, 2010



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



1-2 Tons Compost ~ 2 Tea Aps ~ No Com Fertilizer

Grower:
BCSCD
916 E INTERSTATE AVE

BISMARCK ND
58502

Submitter:
ALLIANCE AG-BISMARCK
1505 YEGEN ROAD SOUTH
BOX 996
BISMARCK ND
58504

Nutrient	Test Level	Rating	Sufficient Range
Total N	3.3 %	S	3.0 To 3.4
P	0.28%	S	0.25 To 0.50
K	2.0 %	S	2.0 To 2.4
S	0.19%	S	0.16 To 0.50
Ca	0.18%	L	0.30 To 0.60
Mg	0.21%	S	0.16 To 0.40
Na	0.01%	S	0.00 To 0.10
Zn	27 ppm	S	20 To 75
Fe	112 ppm	S	50 To 250
Mn	49 ppm	S	18 To 150
Cu	10 ppm	S	5 To 15
B	12 ppm	S	5 To 25

D.R.I.S. FOR CORN:

N	P	K	S	CA	MG	ZN	FE	MN	CU	B
10	-6	8	-8	-39	3	3		5	6	18

Ratings for: CORN 12 in TO TASSLING

VL=Very Low, L=Low, S=Sufficient, H=High, VH=Very High

From: AGVISE LABORATORIES
BOX 510
NORTHWOOD, ND 58267

Date Received: 07-07-10
Date Reported: 07-08-10
Date Sampled: 07-06-10



No Compost ~ No Tea ~ No Com Fertilizer

Grower:
BCSCD
916 E INTERSTATE AVE

BISMARCK ND
58502

Submitter:
ALLIANCE AG-BISMARCK
1505 YBGEN ROAD SOUTH
BOX 996
BISMARCK ND
58504

Nutrient	Test Level	Rating	Sufficient Range
Total N	3.0 %	S	3.0 To 3.4
P	0.30%	S	0.25 To 0.50
K	2.1 %	S	2.0 To 2.4
S	0.20%	S	0.16 To 0.50
Ca	0.21%	L	0.30 To 0.60
Mg	0.23%	S	0.16 To 0.40
Na	0.01%	S	0.00 To 0.10
Zn	28 ppm	S	20 To 75
Fe	107 ppm	S	50 To 250
Mn	54 ppm	S	18 To 150
Cu	10 ppm	S	5 To 15
B	12 ppm	S	5 To 25

D.R.I.S. FOR CORN:

N	P	K	S	CA	MG	ZN	FE	MN	CU	B
4	-5	8	-8	-31	4	3		6	4	16

Ratings for: CORN 12 in TO TASSLING

VL=Very Low, L=Low, S=Sufficient, H=High, VH=Very High



Corn Harvest on November 8, 2010



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



The Menoken Farm ~ Power of Crop Diversity

Both sides were planted into last year's cover crop residue.



Photo: Kathy Fuhrer, NRCS

West Side

- No commercial fertilizer
- No compost
- No compost tea
- 122.3 bushels per acre

East Side

- No commercial fertilizer
- 1-2 tons of compost
- 2 Compost tea applications
- 128.8 bushels per acre





Cool-Season Cover Crop ~ Menoken Farm 2010



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Seeded May 12, 2010

14 Species

• Wheat	28 lbs
• Oat	7 lbs
• Forage Pea	30 lbs
• Lentil	5 lbs
• AC Greenfix	4 lbs
• Turnip	1 lb
• Radish	2 lbs
• Sunflower	2 lbs
• Italian Rye Grass	5 lbs
• Hairy Vetch	5 lbs
• Sweet Clover	1 lb
• Phacelia	2 lbs
• Canola	1 lb
• Flax	1 lb

Total lbs/ac = 95



Phacelia and Native Pollinator



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS





Warm-Season Cover Crop ~ Menoken Farm 2010



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

Seeded June 7, 2010

11 Species

- Soybean 15.0 lbs
- Cowpea 10.0 lbs
- Pearl Millet 4.0 lbs
- Proso Millet 4.0 lbs
- Sunn Hemp 5.0 lbs
- Radish 2.0 lbs
- Turnip 1.0 lb
- Sunflower 2.0 lbs
- Sweet Clover 1.0 lb
- Canola 0.5 lbs
- Plains Coreopsis 0.1 lbs



Livestock Integration will Provide:



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- The economics on cover crop years
- Biology to the soil
- A conversion of high-carbon residue to a lower-carbon material
- Additional recovery time for native rangeland



Where Can We Go in the Great Plains Agricultural System?



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS



Photo: Jay Fuhrer, NRCS

- Supplying the soil biology with food and a home
- Using cropping systems, grazing systems, cover crops, and livestock
- Remember:
 - Minimize soil disturbance
 - Provide armor
 - Continual living roots
 - Diversity, diversity, diversity



Self Education

- The Nature and Properties of Soils
14th Edition – by Dr. Brady and Dr. Weil
- Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden
– by Gilbert Wilson
- Agroecology – by Gliessman
- The One Straw Revolution
– by Masanobu Fukuoka
- Managing Cover Crops Profitably
3rd Edition
- Guns, Germs, and Steel
– by Jared Diamond
- Soil Biology Primer
– by Dr. Elaine Ingham

www.bcscd.com

www.dakotalakes.com

www.sustainableranching.com

www.mandakzerotill.org

www.cedarmeadowfarm.com



Contact Us

THE BURLEIGH COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT
www.bcscd.com



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

www.nrcs.usda.gov



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Information Service**

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