Terminate Cover Crops Early

Hardin County - Not much cover crop got planted last fall and most of it is very small at this time. Cover crops provide protection from soil erosion, utilize nutrients applied in the fall, and improve soil health. However, the termination of cover crops can be difficult if not managed properly.

Improperly terminated cover crops can potentially become weeds, especially annual ryegrass, and can slow soil drying and warming in the spring. When cover crops are allowed to get excessively large the plants can actually dry out the soil and cause yield loss, especially for corn. It is especially important to control cover crops at least 10 days in advance of planting corn to break the green bridge between the cover crop and corn emergence to reduce the risk of cutworm and armyworm problems.

When selecting an herbicide program for termination of a cover crop consider: The cover crop species; The cover crop growth stage; Other weed species present; The crop to be planted; The weather conditions at application; and The type of herbicide used.

Annual ryegrass is the most difficult species to control. Terminate ryegrass before it reaches six inches in height or before the plants begin to joint. If applying glyphosate to ryegrass greater than six inches increase the rate. Apply glyphosate at a minimum rate of 1.5 pounds acid equivalent per acre or 44 fluid ounces of a Roundup branded product. If plants become too large apply glyphosate up to 2.5 pounds acid equivalent per acre. Purdue University data shows adding Sharpen at 1 ounce per acre with glyphosate at 1.5 pounds per acre can improve ryegrass control. Mixing atrazine or metribuzin with glyphosate may reduce control due to antagonism. With the continued cold weather it will be important to allow the ryegrass to resume growth and allow several days of temperatures above 55 to 60 degrees F before
spraying. Apply glyphosate when plants are actively growing and daytime temperatures are above 55°F. Do not spray if night time temperatures go below 40 degrees F. High rates of paraquat plus atrazine applied before corn planting can effectively control ryegrass. Apply the paraquat plus atrazine mixture at a spray volume of 20 gallons per acre.

Cereal rye and wheat are much easier to control. However, the recommendation is still to terminate these crops early. Apply glyphosate at least at 0.75 pounds acid equivalent per acre or 22 fluid ounces per acre of a Roundup branded product for rye and 1.125 pounds acid equivalent per acre or 32 fluid ounces per acre of a Roundup branded product for wheat. If plants get over 18 inches in height or tank-mixing other products with glyphosate, increase the rate to 1.125 to 1.5 pounds acid equivalent per acre.

For control of crimson clover and Austrian winter pea apply glyphosate at 1.125 pounds acid equivalent per acre plus 2,4-D ester at 1 pint per acre. Red clover is more difficult to control. Plants should have some good growth on them before applying herbicides. For red clover, apply glyphosate at 1.5 pounds acid equivalent per acre plus 2,4-D ester at 1 pint per acre. Control may not be complete, so scout to determine if an early postemergence application of glyphosate is necessary. Another option to more effectively control red clover in the burndown is to apply dicamba at 8 fluid ounces per acre plus 2,4-D ester at 1 pint per acre plus glyphosate at 1.125 pounds per acre. However, soybean planting must be delayed 14 days following one inch of rain, so be careful. Be sure the seed slot is closed for corn and soybean as injury will occur. It is advised to delay planting of corn at least 7 days to reduce injury risk.

Scout fields for weeds prior to herbicide application to determine the need for additional herbicides.

*Article written by Jeff Stachler, OSU Extension-Auglaize County*