

Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crop Initiative 2023 Results and Collaboration with Heartland Co-op's Conservation Drainage Program

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DES MOINES - In 2023, nearly \$464,000 in financial assistance was provided to farmers through the Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crop Initiative for cost share associated with cover crop conservation practices through the Water Quality Initiative (WQI). The Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crop Initiative is a project developed by the Iowa Seed Association with the Agribusiness Association of Iowa, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, and Iowa Corn. "Cover crop utilization in a seed corn production system offers a unique opportunity for earlier establishment to further increase soil conservation efforts and protect water quality," said Iowa Seed Association's Board of Directors President Jeff Steinback. In 2023, 137 growers received finance assistance, covering over 32,000 acres, saving almost 97,000 tons of soil, and spending an estimated \$1.15 million of their own money to implement cover crops.

Partnerships with eight seed companies, representing the majority of seed corn production in Iowa, provide cost share, technical assistance, outreach, and education dedicated to seed corn growers. Funding incentives available to seed corn growers are \$15 per acre for winter-hardy and \$10 per acre for winterkill cover crops. An additional \$5 per acre incentive is available for first-time cover crop users. Financial assistance provided by the Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crop Initiative is stackable with private funds, such as the Practical Farmers of Iowa.

In 2023, the Iowa Seed Association collaborated with Heartland Co-op for dedicated outreach and technical assistance for edge-of-field water quality practices that were not invasive to field operations. The Iowa Seed Association's \$10,000 contribution, along with additional contributions from Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance, BASF, Iowa Nutrient Research & Education Council, and Syngenta, supported forty saturated buffers and sixteen bioreactors to be released for bidding this spring in the Big Creek and Lower Cedar River watersheds. According to William Hoffman, a Conservation Agronomist for Heartland Co-op, these structures will drain a total of 3,486 acres and remove an average of 41,831 pounds of nitrogen annually. Identification of potential sites was completed by Hoffman and other Conservation Agronomists from Heartland Co-op, who reached out to landowners and surveyed sites for engineering. By connecting growers with technical and cost share information on these practices, increased knowledge and awareness of these practices can further understanding of conservation practices and facilitate accelerated implementation.

The Iowa Seed Corn Cover Crops Initiative helps increase adoption of cover crops specifically within the seed corn production system in Iowa. The focus on seed corn is driven by the unique opportunity that seed corn provides due to the earlier harvest, thereby providing better timing opportunities for establishing cover crops in the late summer and early fall after harvest. Cost share applications for planting cover crops on seed corn acres this coming fall are currently being accepted. Visit www.sustainableseedcorn.org for more information.

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