

## **FLYING COVER CROPS INTO CORN AND BEANS**

Corn stalks and other crop residues provide good winter feed. Adding cover crops to them can sometimes make them even better. Getting them established, though, can be tricky.

Corn stalks and bean stubble are some of the least expensive winter feeds we have. But once cattle finish eating grain and husks from corn or licking up pods from beans, what remains isn't very good.

Some growers have improved both the amount and quality of corn and bean residue grazing by flying cover crop seed onto standing corn or beans. When successful, cover crops provide more grazing days and extra protein as residues become poorer quality.

Let me emphasize the words 'when successful'. It's not all that easy to get a good stand of cover crops to become productive in a growing corn or bean field.

Several factors limit success rates. Herbicide carryover can cause problems. Also, time of planting is critical to get sunlight to new seedlings. Seed into beans just before leaves start to drop. In corn, many folks wait until plants dry up to the ear. And the earlier these crops can be harvested, the better, for cover crop growth.

Don't be cheap with moisture. Usually it takes about three irrigations or equivalent rainfall to be successful.

Cover crop selection is very important. Only use firm, dense seeds like spring barley, cereal rye, turnip, and radish that don't require much depth of seeding. Avoid large seeds like peas or complex, expensive cocktails.

Lastly is wheel traffic at harvest. Turnips and radishes are damaged more than grasses, but both lose stand if fields get muddy.

I like improving corn stalks or bean stubble with cover crops. But there are challenges, so try to find ways to overcome them.

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