Conservation and the role of cover crops.

Investing in our future

October 1, 2015 / Ray Gaesser
Conservation and the role of cover crops.  
*Investing in our future*
Soil and Water Conservation
Conservation Issues for 2015

1. Conservation compliance linkage to crop insurance
2. CSP farm bill rule
3. Wetlands determinations
4. Cover crops / Weed Management
5. Pollinators
6. CRP
Cover Crops

- Cover crops are of particular interest to Sec. Vilsack and an important part of NRCS’ soil health initiative

- 2012 Ag Census reported 10.3 million acres of cover crops

- RMA, FSA and NRCS established new “termination guidelines” for cover crops on non-irrigated cropland

- 41 groups joined “A Common Vision Statement on Cover Crops and Soil Health” in September 2013

- Goal of 20 million acres or more nationwide by 2020
Sustainable Farming in the U.S.
Extreme rainfall events

Frequency of Storms by Size in the Midwest
Changes by Decade, 1960s Through 2000s, Compared to 1961-1990

Labeled columns represent 2001-2010

- Under 1 inch per day: +2%
- 1 to 2 inches per day: +13%
- 2 to 3 inches per day: +30%
- 3 inches or more per day: +52%
Our Defining Moment

- Four inches of rain in one hour
- Current practices not built to handle that kind of event
- Wake up call to try something new--ADAPT
Successes and Challenges Establishing Cover Crops

- **Legumes**
  - Great nitrogen fixers
  - Need to be planted early to establish

- **Radishes and Turnips**
  - Can help reduce compaction
  - Great at sequestering nutrients
  - Have to be started very early in most cases before the crop is harvested

- **Rye Grass**
  - Deep roots
  - Good nutrient sequestration
  - Needs to be seeded before Oct. and can winter kill

- **Cereal Rye**
  - Winter Hardy
  - Great weed suppression
  - Not as deep roots as other cover
Successes and Challenges Establishing Cover Crops

- Ground applications
  - More Uniformity
  - Lower Cost
  - More time consuming

- Aerial Application
  - Faster
  - Rain timing is key
  - Hard to get even stand
Thank you for listening!