

Area 4

1201 Kentucky 22

Crestwood, Kentucky 40014

Dear Oldham County Citizens,

Soil is a living organism that covers the majority of our world. It is made up of living and non-living organic matter, minerals, nutrients, and liquids. Soil is considered the "skin of the earth." Why then do we do so little to take care of it? For example, many people add pesticides to soil. That would be similar to taking a shower or washing your face with harmful chemicals. Not a good idea! If we do not treat *our skin* that way, why would we treat the *skin of the Earth* that way? Soil is a non-replaceable natural resource that provides approximately 99% of the food we eat. We must treat it with care. One of the best ways we can take care of soil is by using cover crops.

Have you ever passed a farm after the harvest season and noticed a lush green field of grass? That grass is actually a cover crop. A cover crop is any plant grown for the main purpose of improving soil. Rye, field oats, peas, alfalfa, sorghum-sudangrass, buckwheat, and clover are all good examples. A cover crop can also be the residues of once living plants. Cover crops may or may not be harvested. One thing, however, is certain. Cover crops enhance the quality of soil in many ways. They improve soil structure and productivity, reduce soil erosion and provide food and shelter for organisms and microorganisms living there.

Cover crops improve soil structure and productivity by keeping soil moist and adding organic matter to it. Cover crops add nitrogen to the soil, which increases soil fertility. A cover crop can

also suppress weeds and prevent soil from becoming too dense. This allows the soil to breathe.

All of these things are extremely beneficial to the soil and cash crops.

Another benefit of planting cover crops is that they help prevent erosion. Erosion can be caused by things such as rain, run-off water, drought, and wind. Bare soil is especially vulnerable to erosion. By shielding the soil, cover crops can slow the speed of run-off water, limit the effects of raindrops and hold soil in its place. As a result, soil will not be blown away by the wind, burned up by the sun or washed away by rain. This is particularly important on hills and sloping land.

Soil contains organisms, such as insects and earthworms, and microorganisms, like bacteria and fungi. Cover crops offer food and shelter that are essential to the survival of these organisms and microorganisms. Cover crops also reduce the need for tilling. Many people till their soil before planting. This can kill the organisms and microorganisms living there and leave soil bare.

Today, many farmers and homeowners use pesticides on their fields and lawns to control weeds and eliminate harmful pests that feed on crops and grass. These pesticides typically include chemicals that are harmful to people, organisms, microorganisms and the environment. They can damage soil by destroying the beneficial organisms and microorganisms that live there and by weakening the root and immune systems of plants. Cover crops, however, require none of these things. More reasons to use cover crops!

I hope this letter has convinced you to use cover crops. They will improve soil structure and productivity, reduce soil erosion, and nurture the organisms and microorganisms living in soil.

Cover crops will create healthier soil and a healthier planet--for you, me and many generations to come.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Luke Morrison
East Oldham Middle School
Crestwood, Kentucky

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