

# Managing Cover Crops In Dry Spring Conditions

What a difference a year makes. In spring 2011, most of the country was drowning in excess moisture. For managing cover crops in those conditions, the management strategy was to allow cover crops to grow in order to help soak up the extra water. An alternative strategy, when conditions allow in a wet spring, is planning to only control what could effectively be planted before the next expected rain.

In almost every case last year, in fact, cover crops allowed to grow beyond the normal control period were a benefit when an extended period of dry weather began in early summer.

The cover crop residue in 2011 covering the soil surface retained beneficial moisture and kept soil temperatures cooler. In one example, Steve Groff, Cedar Meadow Farm, Holtwood, PA, had planted cover crop test plots. Following the extended dry summer of 2011, the result in fields managed with a cover crop program was a corn yield increase of over 20 bushels per acre, compared to fields that had no cover crops.

### **An Unusually Dry Spring**

Now, in April 2012, many areas are experiencing dry soil conditions, and cover crops require a completely different strategy.



**TillageMax Indy™ Blend shown above is a mix of Tillage Radish®, Tillage RootMax™ Annual Ryegrass, and CCS Crimson Clover.**

Strong consideration needs to be made to control the cover crops early so as not to deplete any more moisture. This is especially true if no significant rain is in sight.

With the early spring most farmers have had, cover crops are already a few weeks ahead of schedule, so few if any cover crop benefits will be compromised by killing them sooner rather than later.

### **Like Any Cover Crop**

Managing cover crops is like aiming at a moving target. You need to adjust for each weather scenario that presents itself. By using some good old fashioned farmer's instinct, close observation and common sense, every farmer can successfully use cover crops to reduce input, increase soil moisture retention, and build soil health that leads directly to a better bottom line.

For more information on cover crops, visit [CoverCropSolutions.com](http://CoverCropSolutions.com), or call **1-800-767-9441**.

For more information on TillageMax Indy™ Blend, visit [TillageRadish.com](http://TillageRadish.com).