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Cover Crops

Cover crops are known to improve crop productivity and enhance soil and water quality. Cover crops can reduce soil erosion, increase residue cover, increase water infiltration, increase soil organic carbon, improve soil physical properties, scavenge and cycle nutrients, suppress weeds, and impact pest cycles. The USDA cost-share program provides incentives for establishing cover crops in conservation tillage systems. This has increased adoption of the practice in northwest Florida. In Santa Rosa County, about 20,000 acres are planted with cover crops following peanut or cotton production. This represents nearly half of the total peanut and cotton acreage and about 65% of the cover crop acreage is cost-shared.

Research has shown that earlier planting and later termination dates can increase biomass production of cover crops (oat, rye or clover). Greater biomass production can suppress weed growth. Yet, excessive biomass could affect establishment of successive crops. Cover crop biomass will impact the amount of surface residues, available soil moisture and soil temperature. It is generally recommended to chemically terminate cover crops 3 to 4 weeks prior to planting peanut or cotton. This will conserve soil moisture and allow time for the soil to warm before planting.

Cool-season cover crop. Photo by Ronnald Schnell
**Pearl Millet—an excellent summer annual**

If looking for a drought tolerant summer annual – Pearl Millet might be the option. This summer forage is probably the most drought resistant of the summer grain crops. This crop prefers well-drained soils, and it is less tolerant of excessive soil moisture or water logging conditions than sorghum. Pearl millet has a high temperature requirement growth and production is generally from late May to September. Planting rates vary from 12 to 15 lb/acre (if using a drill to plant in rows) to 30 to 40 lb/acre if broadcasting the seed. To reduce costs you can use a drill— you will be more efficient, and will be using less seed.

Pearl millet is high in nutritive value with high crude protein and energy that can be used for grazing, hay or silage. It is frequently used with young growing animals or lactating animals with high nutrition requirements, and has the advantage that it is safe to feed to horses. Pearl millet does not produce prussic acid like sorghums do but it can accumulate nitrates in toxic level when fertilized with nitrogen under drought or cloud cover conditions.

If grazing, allow a height of 20 to 25 inches before turning animals in, and removed when stubble height is 6 to 8 inches. Grazing it heavier or lower than 6 inches may compromise survival of the plant.
Wild Radish Control

Wild radish is one of the most common winter weeds infesting crop fields in north Florida. This plant is very tolerant to glyphosate and paraquat burn down applications, making it extremely difficult to manage. This issue is made much worse when you consider that flowering wild radish plants are the most difficult to control, and the warm winter has resulted in blooming since December.

To control wild radish prior to planting, there are several options, but none are particularly effective. Based on this, I would suggest that we start managing this weed early to give plenty of opportunity to make repeat applications.

Cotton

Glufosinate (Liberty 280, Ignite 280), paraquat, and glyphosate provide poor control. Adding dicamba (Clarity) to paraquat or glyphosate improves control, but is not as effective as 2,4-D. 2,4-D is relatively effective, but higher rates must be used and two applications may be necessary. However, it is important to realize that cotton is very sensitive to soil concentrations of 2,4-D and if high rates are to be used, they must be applied well before cotton planting. Harmony Extra or Valor + glyphosate is also somewhat effective on large plants and has a shorter preplant interval than 2,4-D. Paraquat + diuron is also quite effective and can be applied near cotton planting. It may be useful to use 2,4-D + glyphosate as an early burndown and follow up with paraquat + diuron. If using diuron, make sure to follow the recommended use rates based on soil texture and organic matter.

Peanut

Peanut is much more tolerant to soil concentrations of 2,4-D than dicamba. Therefore, dicamba is not recommended prior to peanut planting. A good program for peanut is to use 2,4-D early before planting and glyphosate + Valor immediately after planting. Any plants surviving these applications will be controlled by the imazapic application (Cadre, Impose, etc).

The last issue to consider is tillage. Rather than spraying to control wild radish, which may be difficult to do, tillage is an option that is always effective. If Palmer amaranth is common in a field, incorporating herbicides such as Prowl/Treflan/Sonalan can greatly improve control. Therefore, it radish and Palmer pigweed is concern, tillage may be a viable alternative to improve the management of both species.
**Mark your Calendar: The Aquatic Weed Control Short Course is Coming!**

The annual UF/IFAS Aquatic Weed Control Short Course will once again be held at the Coral Springs Marriott from May 7 through May 10, 2012. This extremely popular, well-attended event is one of the largest extension programs in the country and regularly draws more than 400 people from around the state and the southeastern US.

Participants attend traditional seminars on invasive plant biology and control in aquatic, right-of-way, and natural areas and have the opportunity to take part in interactive learning experiences as well, such as plant identification sessions and calibration and computation workshops. Up to 20 continuing education units (CEUs) are available to licensed pesticide applicators in a number of categories, including Core, Aquatics, Natural Areas, and Right-of-Way.

Special training sessions are also scheduled to prepare new applicators to take Core and Category certification exams, which are administered on-site by FDACS at the conclusion of the Short Course. Speakers are nationally and internationally known for their expertise in weed biology and control and include university and extension faculty, graduate students, industry researchers, and federal and state managers.

Exhibitors include industry representatives, professional associations, and University groups such the UF/IFAS Bookstore, the UF/IFAS Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center and the UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants.

Networking opportunities, such as the Industry Social and Welcome Reception on May 8 and catered breaks between sessions, are plentiful. Make plans today to attend the 2012 Aquatic Weed Control Short Course in Coral Springs to learn the latest techniques and developments in aquatic, right-of-way, and natural areas weed control!

For more information, please visit the Short Course website at [www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/aw](http://www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/aw) or contact Lyn Gettys at lgettys@ufl.edu.
Calendar of Events

To follow the link, press “Ctrl” and put cursor over link, and “click.”

Apr. 11  FL Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) workshop. Lake Alfred, FL
         http://www.crec.ifas.ufl.edu/crec_websites/cca/program.shtml

May 2-4 61st Annual Florida Beef Cattle Short Course, Gainesville, FL
         http://animal.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/beef/BCSC/BCSC2012/short.shtml

May 7-10 Aquatic Weed Control Short Course, Fort Lauderdale, FL
          http://www.biomasssupplychain.com/

May 10  5th Annual Biomass Supply Chain & Logistics Conference, Tone Mountain, GA
         http://www.biomasssupplychain.com/

May 16  Cool Season Workshop—by Cool-season grass initiative, Rogers, AR
         http://www.afgc.org/docs/2012TentativeAgenda.pdf

Mayo 20-26 Caribbean Food Crop Society meeting, Mexico
       http://cfcs.eea.uprm.edu/

June 3-8 9th Intecol International Wetlands Conference, Orlando, FL
          http://www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/intecol/

June 18-22 FL Cattlemen Association Annual Convention and Allied Trade Show, Marco Island, FL.— http://www.floridacattlemen.org/events.html