



# 10 STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING COVER CROPS AND SOIL HEALTH

BWSR Academy

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# STRATEGY 1: FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

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Establish the context/perspective to view cover crops from the right viewpoint.

1. “Try this new practice” vs. “Agriculture is constantly innovating and cover crops are the next step.”
2. “Eventually, you will be regulated to do this.” vs. “cover crops help you become more efficient with inputs.”

## STRATEGY 2: FOCUS ON SOLVING PROBLEMS

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“We’ll cover all of your costs to do this” vs.  
“Here is a way to reduce nematode  
populations and boost soybean yields  
by 10%.”

## STRATEGY 3: CONFRONT THE MYTHS

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Common myths that farmers may or may not mention to you:

1. Cover crops will use up nutrients.
2. Cover crops will keep my soil cold in the spring.
3. Cover crops will harbor diseases and pests.
4. Cover crops will use up my moisture/keep my soils too wet.

Myths are often based on partial information.

## STRATEGY 4: RECOGNIZE ROOT ISSUES IN FARMERS' CONCERNS

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A farmer tells you: “cover crops cost too much.” or “I don’t have time to plant in the fall.”

Underlying message: “I don’t see the value to be worth my money or time.”

## STRATEGY 5: GET AS LOCAL AS POSSIBLE

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2013 Northwest Ohio survey of farmers:  
40% never speak to farmers outside of  
NW Ohio.

One of the most common arguments  
against cover crops: “sure that works  
there, but we are too (cold, wet, hot,  
dry) here.”

Local stories are powerful.

## STRATEGY 6: NUMBERS HAVE POWERFUL COMMUNICATION ABILITY

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- cover crops reduce weed populations by 95%.
- Corn yields improved by 5% following covers in a drought year.
- SOM increased by ½% over 5 years of using cover crops.

# STRATEGY 7: METAPHORS ARE EFFECTIVE TRANSLATORS

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Effective Metaphors:

1. Simplify, translate complex unknowns into commonly known concepts
2. Provide illustrations
3. Make a concept memorable

## STRATEGY 8: FOCUS ON A PURPOSE WITH COVERS

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Establishing a purpose up front creates a means by which to measure and value the cover crop.

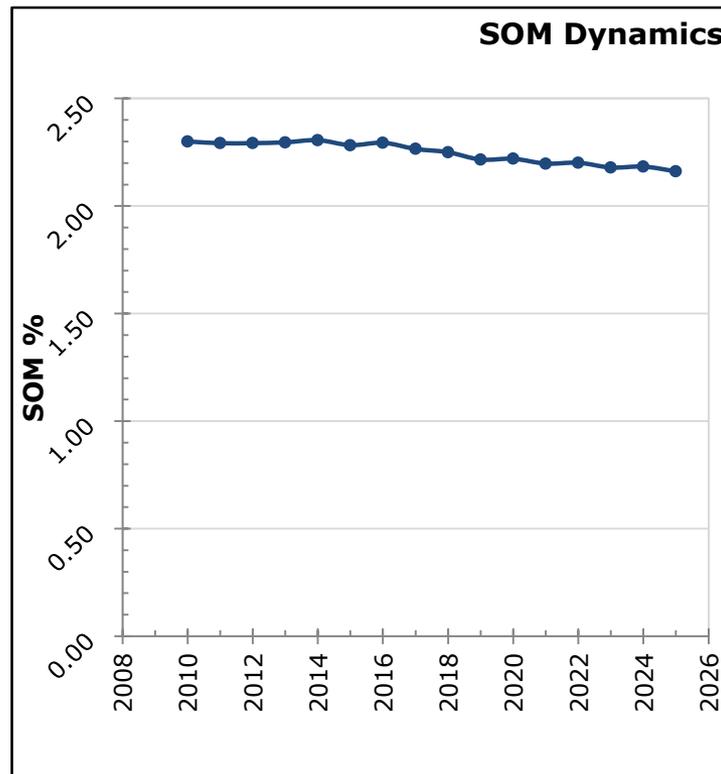
Trying cover crops for the sake of trying will likely result in likely disadoption.

Goals covers may achieve

1. Increase SOM
2. Improve soil tilth and structure
3. Outcompete weeds and control difficult weeds
4. Provide nutrients/hold onto nutrients

# STRATEGY 9: HIGHLIGHT THE RISK OF CURRENT PRACTICES TO BALANCE THE SENSITIVITY TO RISKS WITH NEW PRACTICES

## SOM levels of a corn-bean rotation



## Guidelines

1. Listen to farmers' goals.
2. Most farmers are unaware or underestimate erosion or SOM loss.

## STRATEGY 10: BE THE RESOURCE BEYOND COST SHARE ASSISTANCE

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You don't need to do everything, or even anything, on cover crops. Just be able to connect farmers to the right resources.

An survey of Indiana farmers using cover crops indicated 56% do not receive cost share.

# STRATEGY RECAP

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1. Framing the discussion
2. Focus on solving problems
3. Confront the myths
4. Recognize root issues in farmers' concerns
5. Get as local as possible
6. Numbers have powerful communication ability
7. Metaphors are effective translators
8. Focus on a purpose with covers
9. Deftly highlight risks with current practices to provide balance to farmers' risk sensitivity to using new practices
10. Be the resources beyond cost share assistance



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