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## Small Grains News - Adding small grains to a crop rotation + Cover crop cost-share enrolling

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To Anna Pesek <anna.pesek@practicalfarmers.org>



**October 2024**

*Equipping farmers to build resilient farms and communities.*



### **Adding small grains to a crop rotation with farmer Andy Benseid**

While its peak corn and soybean harvest across the Midwest, it's also an opportune time to consider the impacts of small grains in crop rotations.

In 2024, 60% of farmers enrolled in PFI's small grain cost-share reported increased yields and lower production costs in their corn and soybeans grown in extended rotations. One of those farmers is **Andy Bensend** who farms in Barron County, Wisconsin.

As an advocate of crop rotation, Andy advises, "While we can produce high yields in monoculture, over time, input costs will increase."

**Keeping production costs low in corn:** By following his wheat with a summer mix containing medium red and crimson clovers, Andy can reduce his fertilizer in corn by 50 to 70 pounds of nitrogen per year. He notes his yields are the same as, or better than, his corn in a two-year rotation. However, Andy is purposeful about the amount of fertilizer he cuts. "Every year we take a look at our cover crop biomass and evaluate how many credits may be available," he notes, while also sharing that they typically perform a Haney Test to see available soil nitrogen.

**Increasing yields in soybeans:** The biggest benefit Andy has witnessed for his soybeans in extended rotations is weed control. "When we harvest wheat mid-summer, we put a nail in the coffin for those weeds that go to seed later in the season," he says. Lowering the weed seed bank of species like giant ragweed, marehail and water hemp is essential for Andy's non-GMO soybean management.

## PROGRAM UPDATES

### Grow your business with our new Sustainable Agriculture Business Incubator



This new program is ideal for agricultural entrepreneurs and businesses looking for high-level business coaching to support problem solving to help them remove barriers and reach their goals.

Examples of businesses that may be a good fit for this program include farmers with a value-added product they are looking to scale-up, food or grain mills, cover crop seed businesses, aggregators and distributors of locally produced food, and more.

**[Apply for the program by Nov. 4.](#)**

### Sign up for PFI's cover crop cost-share





Are you preparing to, or have you already, seeded your cover crops? Are you sharing the cost with PFI?

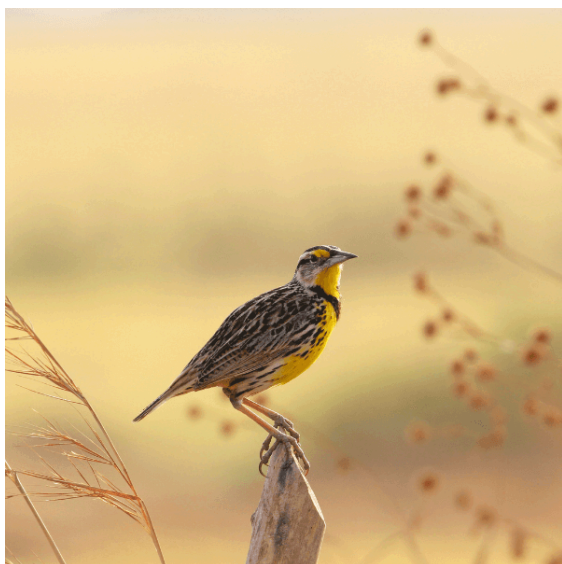
Applications for our cover crop cost-share program are open.

Payment rates are \$10 or \$15 per acre on an unlimited number of acres. The program extends beyond Iowa and is stackable with any publicly funded cost-share programs.

**[Check your eligibility and enroll.](#)**

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## **New American Bird Conservancy program offers funding to farmers sourcing non-neonicotinoid treated seeds**



American Bird Conservancy is now offering the **[Untreated Seed Pilot Program](#)**, which pays farmers on a per-acre basis for using corn, soybean or wheat seed not coated with neonicotinoid insecticides. **[Find out more about rates and apply for funds.](#)**

Explore the results of untreated seed trials from past farmer-led PFI research in the additional resources section below.

### **IN THE FIELD**

## **“Test Before Feeding: Oats, Barley, Wheat, and Rye Grown in 2024 May Contain Mycotoxins”**



Due to a wet spring and early summer, various small grains are showing high levels of mycotoxins due to diseases such as rusts and Fusarium/scab. These toxins can be dangerous to animal and human health when the levels are high.

Review definitions, recommendations, allowed vomitoxin levels, testing options and other helpful resources in [this blog post](#) shared by farmer and PFI member **Margaret Smith** through Albert Lea Seed.

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## New blog post: "Exploring Opportunities for Marketing Wheat Straw"



Finding markets for straw can be challenging, but once found, the demand keeps growing.

Hear **Angela and Kerry Knuth's** transformation from old-school baling parties to efficient, mechanized bale production using a Bale Baron to meet the market demand near Omaha, Nebraska.

Read their straw story in this [new blog](#) recap of their September shared learning call.

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## "Giving Credit Where It's Due to Small Grains in the Rotation"



"Having a small grain in our operation, we have to determine the profitability that crop has in itself but also what effect it has in the rotation," says David Hooker, professor and researcher at University of Guelph in Ontario.

Read this [2019 blog](#) to hear David's analysis of the results from the long-term crop rotation research trials in Ontario that have shown the value of small grains in improving corn and soybean yields while reducing nitrogen inputs.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Farmer-led research reports on seed treatments:

- 2022 report: ["Are Soybean Seed Treatments Necessary?"](#)
- 2022 report: ["Are Fungicide and Insecticide Seed Treatments Necessary for Corn?"](#)
- 2021 report: ["Are Soybean Seed Treatments Justified?"](#)
- 2020 report: ["Are Neonic + Fungicide Soybean Seed Treatments Justified?"](#)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Field day: "A Farmer's Soil Health Journey: No-Till Cover Crop Synergies"





**Thursday, Nov. 21 | 9-11:30 a.m. | Plainfield, IA**

**Keith Lovrien** raises corn and soybeans in northeastern Iowa. Eight years ago, Keith added cover crops to his operation, which profoundly improved his soil health and crop yield.

Learn from Keith's experience about soil health and conservation practices on his farm.

**[RSVP to attend this field day.](#)**

## Upcoming PFI events

*All events listed in Central time.*

**Nov. 21: Field Day – [A Farmer's Soil Health Journey: No-Till Cover Crop Synergies](#)**

*Host: Keith Lovrien*

9-11:30 a.m. | Plainfield, IA

**Dec. 4: Field Day – [Reading Between the Aggregates: What Your Soil Can Tell You About Farm Management](#)**

*Host: Ryan Gibbs*

4-6 p.m. | Hopkinton, IA

**Dec. 6: Small Grains Shared Learning Call – [Topic TBD](#)**

Noon-1 p.m. | **[Online](#)**

## Friends of PFI events

**Nov. 6: Webinar – [Pennsylvania's Remerging Flax to Linen Industry](#)**

*Hosted by: Rodale Institute*

1-2 p.m. CST | **[Online](#)**

**Nov. 13: Webinar – [Many Little Hammers – A Multitactical Approach to Managing Weeds in Your Cropping System](#)**

*Hosted by: Rodale Institute*

1-2 p.m. CST | Online

**Nov. 19: Conference – Central Nebraska Regenerative Ag Conference**

*Hosted by: Central Community College*  
8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. | Holdrege, NE  
**\*\*\*Visit PFI staff at this event\*\*\***

**Nov. 24-25: Conference – 2024 Iowa Organic Conference**

*Hosted by: Iowa State University Organic Agriculture Program*  
7:30 a.m.-5 p.m. | Iowa City, IA

**Dec. 3-4: Conference – Premier Soil Health Event**

*Hosted by: Minnesota Soil Health Coalition*  
9 a.m.-3 p.m. | Mankato, MN

**Dec. 9-11: Conference – The Big Soil Health Event**

*Hosted by: Soil Regen*  
Cedar Falls, IA

**View our events calendar**

**Contact our team**

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**Chat with any of us by calling the PFI office at (515)232-5661.**

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