

**National Wildlife Federation and Heron Lake Watershed District
Cover Crop Champions Final Report
October 26, 2016**

A. Name and contact information of individual submitting report

Project Manager: Jan Voit, District Administrator
Organization: Heron Lake Watershed District
Address: PO Box 345, Heron Lake, MN 56137
Phone: 507-793-2462
Email: jan.voit@mysmbs.com

B. Name of farmer and outreach champions/organizations included in the grant (only one report required per grant)

Farmer Champions: Jerry & Nancy Ackermann
Address: 39750 820th Street, Lakefield, MN 56150
Phone: 507-662-5584
Email: ackermann.jn@gmail.com

Farmer Champion: Dave Christoffer
Type of Organization: Landowner
Address: 78597 370th Avenue, Okabena, MN 56161
Phone: 507-853-4496
Email: dmcoka@gmail.com

Outreach Champion: Jan Voit, District Administrator
Organization: Heron Lake Watershed District
Address: PO Box 345, Heron Lake, MN 56137
Phone: 507-793-2462
Email: jan.voit@mysmbs.com

Outreach Champion: Catherine Wegehaupt, Watershed Technician
Organization: Heron Lake Watershed District
Address: PO Box 345, Heron Lake, MN 56137
Phone: 507-376-9150 extension 111
Email: catherine.wegehaupt@noblesswcd.org

- C. List each project deliverable, as stated in your grant agreement, and describe the progress you have made towards meeting each of your project deliverables. Only include achievements for the duration of the 2016 grant (effective and end) dates.

Deliverable 1 Test Plot Field Days

Conduct outreach to farmers and crop advisors by speaking at test plot field days

- Catherine Wegehaupt discussed upcoming field days with Jerry Ackermann on August 9, 2016.
- Jerry and Nancy Ackermann attended Jared and Mary Herbert's cover crop field day at Lake Park, Iowa on August 10, 2016. There were approximately 50 farmers and cooperative employees in attendance.
- Jerry Ackermann spoke at a field day north of Bingham Lake on September 7, 2016. The event was sponsored by the Cottonwood County Natural Resources Conservation Service. There were approximately 120 farmers and cooperative employees in attendance.
- On August 23, 2016, Catherine Wegehaupt and Jerry Ackermann discussed the possible ways to work with cooperatives to incorporate cover crops into field days in 2017.
- Jerry and Nancy Ackermann attended Brian Biegler's cover crop field day by Lake Wilson, Minnesota on September 15, 2016. There were approximately 80 farmers and cooperative employees in attendance.

Deliverable 2 Connect with Cooperatives

Directly connect with the agronomy staff at three local producer cooperatives to increase cover crop implementation by their members

- Jerry Ackermann spoke with Court Baumgard, New Vision Cooperative about spinner spreader and other cover crop seed applications on April 15, 2016.
- A letter was drafted and distributed to Meadowland Farmers' Cooperative, New Vision Cooperative, and FCA Co-op on June 8, 2016.
- After the letters were sent, Dave Christoffer and Catherine Wegehaupt made follow up calls. Dave contacted Court Baumgard with New Vision on June 13, 2016. Discussion was held regarding cover crops being demonstrated in test plots. Court planned to discuss with his team and get back to Dave.
- On June 13, 2016, Catherine contacted FCA Co-op in Jackson. The FCA Co-op test plots have all been put into a ten-year research plot. No additional research can be done on these fields. The FCA Co-op plans field day events for summer and winter. The FCA Co-Op felt it would be great to have information about cover crops available to local farmers at these events. Arrangements were made to have a booth at the August field day.
- Dave Christoffer spoke with Court Baumgard, New Vision Cooperative about using cover crops in test plots on June 20, 2016.
- Dave Christoffer contacted Crop Production Services in Lakefield, Minnesota to discuss cover crops in test plots on June 20, 2016.
- Meadowland Farmers' Cooperative was contacted. There wasn't any interest in incorporating any cover crops into local field plots. Their reason was due to the lack

of knowledge on using them. Discussion was held about the possibility of Land O'Lakes incorporating them.

- Nancy Ackermann spoke with Court Baumgard, New Vision Co-op on September 7, 2016. New Vision Co-op holds winter meetings for their employees. These meetings may provide an opportunity to promote cover crops with cooperative employees. Tim Hansberger, a watershed landowner that works with the HLWD through another cover crop funding mechanism, is a member of the New Vision board. Contact will be made with him regarding this subject. Tim Hansberger had New Vision do a cover crop spreading along with his fertilizer application in the summer of 2016.
- Ben Olsem contacted Jerry and Nancy Ackermann and had them order cereal rye for Meadowland Co-op in Sanborn, Minnesota.
- FCA Co-op and Crystal Valley Co-op are considering a merger. If this happens, there may be new prospective contacts for cover crops within the organization.

Deliverable 3 Contact Crop Advisor Association

Contact a local crop advisor's association with cover crop information

- On September 29, 2016, Jan Voit gathered crop consultant contact information.
- On October 3, 2016, Jan Voit drafted a memo to crop consultants regarding HLWD cover crop endeavors.
- On October 4, 2016, Catherine Wegehaupt drafted cover crop information for distribution to crop consultants.
- The memo and cover crop information was distributed via email on October 4, 2016.
- On October 6, 2016, Dave Christoffer spoke with Matt Benda, board member for the Minnesota Certified Crop Advisors Association about the general sentiment of the advisors in the state regarding the use of cover crops. Matt indicated that the advisors look favorably on the use of cover crops.

Deliverable 4 Written Communications

Promote cover crops through written communications to the community, including newsletters, articles in trade publications, mailings, and other educational materials

- Dave Christoffer was interviewed by a reporter for the *Farm Market News* on June 6, 2016. The topics were clean water incentives and cover crops.
- An on-farm interview was conducted with *Farm Market News* on June 15, 2016.
- The *Farm Market News* is delivered to rural residents in parts of 13 counties in southwest Minnesota, four counties in southeast South Dakota, and six counties in northwest Iowa. In addition to this rural resident delivery, there are also copies available for pickup at local coffee shops and business places. With a circulation of over 18,000, the *Farm Market News* reaches more rural households than any other farm publication in the Southwest Minnesota Market Area. *Farm Market News* is a publication of Pipestone Publishing Company, Inc.
- Catherine Wegehaupt and Jan Voit drafted an article regarding cover crops during the month of September. It was submitted to local news media on September 27, 2016.
- The article was published in the *Tri County News* on September 28, 2016. Circulation is 575 weekly copies.

- The article was published in the *Daily Globe* on October 11, 2016. Circulation is approximately 8,000 daily copies.
- The article was published in the Fall Ag Edition, an insert in the *Lakefield Standard* and *Jackson County Pilot*, on October 13, 2016. Circulation is approximately 1,050 copies reaching 2,415 readers and 1,800 weekly copies reaching 4,140 readers, respectively.
- The article was published in the *Cottonwood County Citizen* on October 13, 2016. Circulation is about 2,500 weekly copies.

Deliverable 5 HLWD Website

Provide data on cover crops on HLWD's website (<http://www.hlwdonline.org/php>)

- In March of 2016, a webpage dedicated to the NWF grant was created and published on the HLWD website.
- In June of 2016, the webpage was updated to include cover crop information from Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Iowa Learning Farms, University of Minnesota, and Iowa State University.
- The *Farm Market News* article and Ag Awareness Event summary were uploaded to the webpage on July 26, 2016.
- The *Tri County News*, *Daily Globe*, and *Cottonwood County Citizen* articles were uploaded to the webpage on October 18, 2016.
- The *Lakefield Standard/Jackson County Pilot* article was uploaded to the webpage on October 19, 2016.

Deliverable 6 NWF Media Training

Send at least one and up to two representatives to attend a training session on use of media hosted by NWF

- Jan Voit made travel arrangements for attendance at the media training.
- Dave Christoffer and Catherine Wegehaupt attended media training in Chicago, Illinois on March 1 and 2, 2016. The training was a great opportunity to learn new ways to communicate with various audiences and deliver an effective message. Topics that were covered included how to create a message for different audiences, presenting skills, creating a story, and using pictures. Outreach topics included interviewing, presenting with a PowerPoint, and how to use media effectively. The skills covered at the training was used to create a message to reach out to the local Co-ops. The presentation skills will be used in the future to reach out to farmers in large group settings.

Deliverable 7 Reporting

Track and share successes with NWF by completing two reports over the program period describing how the funds were used toward achieving project deliverables

- Lekha Knuffman, NWF, provided a draft version of the grant agreement on February 16, 2016. It was approved by NWF on February 25, 2016.
- Jan Voit began drafting the interim report on June 28, 2016. Work continued on June 30, 2016.
- Jan Voit and Catherine Wegehaupt continued work on the interim report on July 5, 6, and 7, 2016. The report was submitted on July 7, 2016.

- Jan Voit began drafting the final report on October 6, 2016. Work continued on October 18 and 19, 2016.

Deliverable 8 Education Opportunities

Educate at least 150 farmers and 10 crop advisors about the benefits of cover cropping as a practice and document the number of farmers and crop advisors in each report to NWF

- Catherine Wegehaupt and Jerry Ackermann attended a cover crop meeting with local farmers on March 17, 2016. The meeting consisted of roughly 20 farmers from Nobles and Jackson County.
- Catherine Wegehaupt discussed cover crop options with a farmer on May 24, 2016.
- Dave Christoffer spoke with a local farmer about cover crops on June 3, 2016.
- Jerry Ackermann spoke with a local farmer about using cover crops on June 7, 2016.
- Jerry Ackermann spoke with Joel Hovland about cover crops on June 8, 2016.
- Dave Christoffer spoke with a local farmer about seed mixes on June 10, 2016.
- Catherine Wegehaupt discussed fall cover crop plans with a farmer on June 15, 2016.
- Jerry Ackermann talked with Rod Dicks about cover crop seeding on June 15, 2016.
- Jerry Ackermann met with Matt Henning to discuss cover crops on June 16, 2016.
- Jerry Ackermann met with Bruce Brunk on June 18, 2016 to view how his equipment works.
- Jerry Ackermann spoke with Randy Wietzema about cover crops on June 18, 2016.
- Jerry Ackermann discussed strip till applications of cover crops with two local farmers on June 20, 2016.
- Jerry and Nancy Ackermann attended a cover crop field day in Clark's Grove, Minnesota on June 23, 2016.
- Throughout the month of June, Dave Christoffer spent time converting an old grain drill into a cover crop interseeder.
- Jan Voit spoke with Rachel Daberkow on June 28, 2016. Jackson County Farm Bureau is hosting an Ag Awareness Event on July 21, 2016 from 4:30 pm to 7 pm at AGCO in Jackson. They have requested the HLWD's participation. HLWD staff will create a display board and cover crop handouts to distribute.
- Catherine Wegehaupt worked on the display board on July 11 and 13, 2016. She discussed the display board with Jan Voit on July 14, 2016. The board was completed on July 19, 2016.
- Catherine Wegehaupt and Jan Voit attended the Ag Awareness Event on July 21, 2016. The display board and cover crop handouts were available at the HLWD's booth. The EnviroScape watershed model was used to provide education opportunities for attendees. Presentations were given to approximately 30 people.

Deliverable 9 NWF Communication

Communicate with other cover crop champions on a regular basis, through regularly scheduled phone calls and a listserv hosted by NWF

- Information received via listserv.

- D. Please estimate the number of new acres of cover crops that will be planted due to your efforts. (Optional. If you feel you cannot estimate the number of acres, this is not necessary. If you are certain that a number of new farmers will plant a certain number of acres, please share that information.)**

In 2016 alone, over 5,800 acres of cover crop seed was sold and distributed to farmers in Nobles and Jackson County, Minnesota. More acres were planted with cover crop seed, but the exact number is unknown.

- E. List any attachments you would like to include, and please attach them separately or as one document. Pictures or visuals are encouraged and please share any photos of field days and/or cover crops.**

1. Farm Market News Article
2. Letter to Cooperatives
3. 2015 MCCA Board Roster
4. Crop Consultants Contact List
5. Infiltration Results
6. Memo to Crop Consultants
7. Tri County News Article
8. Daily Globe Article
9. Cottonwood County Citizen
10. Livewire Pilot Article

- F. What has been your greatest accomplishment as part of the champions' program? What are the reasons for that success?**

The greatest accomplishment from this grant is the amount of education that has been conducted in southwest Minnesota through articles, as well as reaching out to cooperatives and agronomists. In addition to the Cover Crop Champions grant, the Heron Lake Watershed District (HLWD) and a core group of local farmers have partnered and received funding for cover crop efforts through the Environmental Protection Agency Section 319, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant programs. These grants provided opportunities to fund research, education, and outreach endeavors. Farmers look to other farmers for information in a fast changing agricultural market. Because farmers have partnered with the HLWD, field days have been hosted, one-on-one contacts have been made, and various research plots have been put in place. Education is also a huge part of moving forward with adopting cover crops. Information and education have been given to farmers, agronomists, local conservation offices, and the general public.

- G. What has been your greatest struggle or challenge in getting farmers to adopt cover crops? To what do you attribute their resistance?**

In southwest Minnesota, the greatest challenge in getting farmers to adopt cover crops is economics. Using cover crops is a fairly new practice in agriculture. Farmers run their operations as a business and increasing input costs need to show a return for the investment. A big selling point is letting farmers know that by using cover crops a reduction in other inputs cost is a possibility. Cover crops could provide many benefits including decreased weed pressure, and herbicide use, as well as decreased expenditures on diesel fuel due to less tillage. The nutrients stored by the cover crops

could result in using less commercial fertilizer. All of this is good news for those wanting to try cover crops. However, changing farm management is a big challenge. Farmers fear that changing their inputs will result in a yield decline and adopting cover crops has been a slow change because of this reason. The more research and education available on a local basis vastly increases interest and the possibility of cover crop implementation.