

Green manure for desert soil

By GEORGE KENNEY

In years gone by, land development in North Morrow County was usually done 5 or 10 acres at a time. But times have changed and so has the scope of land development. Thousands of acres may be broken out of desert and put into production at one time. It is no longer then practical or wise to just wait until a blow breaks out and then run for the honey wagon and straw.

The key word when dealing with wind erosion on land developments the size we have seen in this area is not control but PREVENTION.

One preventative measure the corporations have used with very good success is the use of green manure crops. Planted preferably right after harvest or early enough to allow good fall growth, these crops have the added advantage of serving as a cover crop.

Besides the obvious advantage of serving as a cover crop during fall and early spring winds, the incorporation of

green manure crop into the soil also gives at least four other benefits:

1. Green manure adds organic matter to the soil. Soil tests by a local fertilizer company show our desert soils to range between .4-.5 per cent organic matter or practically nonexistent. These desert soils are prone to blow because their coarse texture and very low organic matter allows very little soil structure (the ability to form clods). The addition of organic matter improves this soil structure. Unfortunately, commercial fertilizer cannot directly provide this organic matter.

2. The incorporation of green manure returns soil nitrogen. If legume is used there will be a net increase in nitrogen due to the fixing ability of legume.

3. The organic material added by green manure is also used as food by soil organisms and allows a build up of these micro organisms.

4. A growing green manure crop has a conserving influence by taking up soluble

nutrients that might otherwise be lost by leaching or erosion.

In selecting a green manure crop these characteristics should be kept in mind:

1. Rapid growth.
2. A large volume of tops.
3. The ability to grow well on poor soils.

Crops used locally include wheat, sudan grass, corn, wheat grass and oats.

In conclusion, green manure crops provide a practical and economically beneficial means for land developers to prevent wind erosion and the Morrow County Soil and Water Conservation District would like to thank local land developers who have utilized this cultural practice.



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