



## **New Twist to Cover Crops**

S.D. grower tries to put the bloom on sunflower with a spring cocktail.

*Compiled by staff*

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Most cover crops in South Dakota and North Dakota are being planted in July and August after harvesting winter wheat, spring wheat or field pea.

Mark Weinheimer, Onida, S.D., followed that recipe when he started adding cover crops to his wheat-corn-sunflower rotation. He planted a cover crop after winter wheat and then planted the corn into the cover crop stubble the following year.

But this season, Weinheimer added a new twist to cover cropping. He planted cover crop cocktail – a mixture of plant species -- in the spring before planting sunflower.

"We typically plant sunflowers June 15, so in the past a good portion of the growing season the ground is idle. I knew I wouldn't get a lot of growth from the cover crop, but I wanted to add some nitrogen to the soil after the corn," he says.

He killed the cover crop with herbicide before planting sunflowers.

The sunflowers look good.

"Ultimately the health of everything starts with the soil," says Weinheimer. "I am always looking for ways to build overall soil health which does so many good things that will make our entire cropping system healthier."

Weinheimer works with Justin Fruechte, forage and cover crop specialist for Millborn Seeds, Brookings, S.D., to select cover crops. He likes to use cocktails containing five different plant species whenever possible.

"When you look at the native range, there's a large diversity of plants. Plant diversity increases the soil health," Weinheimer said.

Increasing the soil health naturally reduces the need for costly inputs.

"The days of cheap fertilizer are over. When we apply fertilizer we're filling a nutritional void in the soil biology that the crop needs," he says.

To learn more about how cover crops can increase your soil health, contact Justin Fruechte at 888-498-7333 or [justinf@millbornseeds.com](mailto:justinf@millbornseeds.com).