

SMART CROPS FOR CLEAN WATER

Clean, safe water is important to Minnesota's families, communities and economy. Addressing today's most common cause of water pollution – non-point source runoff from cropland – is doable. New high-efficiency agricultural cropping systems in development by the Forever Green Program at the University of Minnesota will boost farm productivity, profitability and nutrient utilization, as well as reduce farm pollution to protect our water.





Photo: USDA, via Wikimedia Commons

PROBLEM

Minnesota’s agricultural landscape is dominated by summer-annual crops (e.g., field corn and soybeans). During the summer months, crops soak up most of the nutrients available in the soil. But this happens only a few months of the year. The rest of the year, the fields are inactive. Without active plant root systems to hold soil in place and absorb the water, fields are much more vulnerable to wind and water erosion, and nutrient run off, a major contributor to non-point source pollution. Six out of seven – 86% – of water quality impairments in Minnesota are caused by such non-point sources.¹

Ongoing funding is required to continue development of next generation high-efficiency, smart cropping systems that increase farm profitability and productivity while improving soil health, wildlife habitat and water quality. The Legislature provided one-time funding in 2014, which is now being utilized effectively in the University of Minnesota Forever Green Program. Key to the program’s success, however, is ongoing funding to do the necessary research over multiple growing seasons.

POSITION STATEMENT

Advance the Forever Green Program: provide long-term funding for research at the University of Minnesota to accelerate development of economically viable perennial and cover crop options that enhance farm prosperity, habitat and water quality.

¹Source: Minnesota Water Quality – David Fairburn – University of MN Water Resources Center – MN Water Sustainability Framework – page 24

CONTACTS

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BUFFERS PROTECT OUR WATERS AND HABITAT

Minnesota Environmental Partnership supports Governor Dayton’s initiative to create a 50-foot buffer of vegetation along the shores of all Minnesota’s rivers, streams and lakes. Buffers are strips of permanent vegetation that stabilizes the stream banks and shorelines to prevent erosion and act as sponges, filtering runoff of pollutants such as sediment, fertilizers and pesticides.

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, buffers intercept surface runoff and remove up to 75% of sediment, 60% of some pathogens and 50% or more of fertilizers and pesticides before they end up in our rivers and lakes.

Not only are buffers effective at reducing nutrient pollution and improving water quality, they also provide critical habitat for many species of wildlife, including pheasants, migratory songbirds and pollinators such as bees and monarch butterflies. Better lake and stream buffers are urgently needed to protect and restore water quality and wildlife habitat.