There has been a lot of discussion happening on cover crops statewide and regionally. We know cover crops are used to manage soil erosion between normal crop rotations, but do cover crops pay? What seed types are most effective? Do cover crops increase yields? Management methods, planting dates, seed types, timing and weather all play a part. In an effort to answer these important questions and evaluate these variables, Yahara Pride Farms (YPF) offers cost-share assistance for farmers to try out different cover crops and is also working on a cover crop demonstration plot in partnership with UW-Extension’s crop and soils educator, Heidi Johnson and seed company Partners in Production.

What we’ve learned so far

According to Heidi, by effectively managing a cover crop, farmers will see a reduction in soil erosion and long-term improvements in soil condition, which can result in increased yields, reduction in nitrogen fertilizer need and higher yields in years with environmental stresses. In the short-term, cover crops can provide nitrogen credits and take up nitrogen that could be lost to leaching, which can allow for an increased subsequent crop yield and improved soil health.

Through the cover crop demonstration plot, we have found that one of the most important factors to consider when planting cover crops is timing. The earlier you get your cover crops in after corn silage, the better. Planting cover crops before manure application after silage harvest works very well. Additionally, with low soil disturbance manure injection systems we can apply manure after the cover crop has been established.

In 2015, the demonstration plot will be looking at the effects of cutting back on cover crop seed rates (full, ¾ and ½ rates) and eliminating the variable planting dates that we evaluated in 2014. The seed types that will be evaluated this year will be rye, wheat, oats, barley and the combination of barley and winter wheat.

To share information learned from planting cover crops with our farmer network we interviewed Jeff Endres of Endres Berryridge Farms and Greg Ziegler of Ziegler Dairy to tell us more about the payoff they’ve seen by trying cover crops through the YPF cost-share program since 2012.

Jeff Endres, Endres Berryridge Farms

The cover crop combination that has been most effective for Endres Berryridge Farms is winter wheat followed by a mixture of peas and barley after the winter wheat is harvested in late summer. The winter wheat acts as a cover crop throughout the winter months, while the peas and barley act as a cover crop for late summer and early fall. The cover crops prepare the field for the next spring’s crop and allow Berryridge Farms to grow three different crops in one year with only tilling the ground once. This also gives the option to incorporate manure after winter wheat harvest.

Using cover crops as forage

Planting cover crops mid- to late-August allows enough growing season...
Yahara Pride Farms has come a long way since we formed in 2011. In January, the Yahara Pride Farms board got together to update how we represent who we are and what we do. We hope that when you read about what we strive to do, you’ll see that our goals are similar to yours.

Who we are
Yahara Pride Farms is a farmer-led, not-for-profit organization working to improve soil and water quality. We strive to help advance new ideas and technology that achieve both water quality improvement and farm sustainability with overall farm profitability.

What we strive to do
1. Create a mechanism to show farmer environmental sustainability and reward farmers for good stewardship along with a way to track collective progress to show watershed advancement.
2. Help inform farmers of new water quality rules, laws, and issues through our farmer network of information sharing.
3. Help advance new ideas and technology that yield better water quality along with farm profitability.
4. Through our projects and educational programs, earn the trust and respect of farmers, private citizens, and government by showing that agriculture is committed to doing its fair share in making improvements in the watershed.
5. Create the Yahara Pride brand name that both farmers and citizens can relate to.

We also looked at what it means to be a “member.” We don’t have a traditional membership, but we would like to recognize the farmers that participate in our cost-share program and our certification program, and those that attend our events. We came up with the following terms:

A “Yahara Pride Farmer”:
An active participant that utilizes our cost-share program and/or certification program and also attends our networking events.

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Yahara Pride Farmers and Yahara Pride Certified Farmers are eligible for discounted products and services at selected local agribusinesses. See the inset benefits sheet for details.
2015 Watershed-Wide Conference recap

Todd Stuntebeck, physical scientist at the U.S. Geological Survey, shared take-home points from 2014 based on water quality monitoring data. One interesting point is that USGS found that more than half of the total phosphorus entering the Yahara Watershed in 2014 was delivered in 12 days during early-spring snowmelt. Todd recommended entering the Yahara Watershed in 2014 was delivered in 12 days during early-spring snowmelt. Todd Stuntebeck, physical scientist at the U.S. Geological Survey, shared take-home points from 2014 based on water quality monitoring data. One interesting point is that USGS found that more than half of the total phosphorus entering the Yahara Watershed in 2014 was delivered in 12 days during early-spring snowmelt. Todd recommended entering the Yahara Watershed in 2014 was delivered in 12 days during early-spring snowmelt. Todd Stuntebeck, physical scientist at the U.S. Geological Survey, shared take-home points from 2014 based on water quality monitoring data. 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Yahara 2070 is a set of four scenarios about the future of the Yahara Watershed. Illustrations by John Miller.

I invite you to learn more about Yahara 2070 at yahara2070.org. You can explore the four scenarios and consider what each might mean for your farm or community. You might even want to engage others in a conversation about what your desired story for 2070 would be.

If you’d like to connect about opportunities to start a conversation about the future in your community, please contact Jenny Seifert at jseifert2@wisc.edu or 608-890-2137.

Farmers play an important role in shaping the watershed’s future, especially since agriculture is a big factor in the long-term success of the region’s economy and quality of life.

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DISCOUNTED PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Yahara Pride Farms

PERKS + BENEFITS FOR OUR MEMBERS

Yahara Pride Farms is proud to partner with the following local agribusinesses to provide discounted products and services to those who participate in our certification and/or cost-share programs.

Yahara Pride Certified Farmers

A Yahara Pride Farms active participant that has gone through our certification program and has received a score of at least an 80%. Yahara Pride Certified Farmers are eligible for all of the listed benefits as well as the following:

- $500 off Badgerland Financial Loan Servicing, Processing or Appraisal Fees
- $250 off Badgerland Financial Tax or Farm Accounting Services
- $250 towards registration fees to attend industry meetings & conferences

Benefits for all Yahara Pride Farmers

A Yahara Pride Farmer is an active participant that utilizes our cost-share program and/or certification program and also attends our networking events.

To utilize these discounts, please present your Yahara Pride Farmer membership card.

Jim Kazmierczak’s family has been in agriculture in WI since the 1800s and has been seeding cover crops for over 65 years. Kaz’s Flying Service, Ltd. will give a 10% discount on aerial seeding to Yahara Pride Farmers. To redeem the discount, proof of 2015 membership must be supplied to Kaz’s before or on the day of application, before the application starts.

MSA Professional Services offers Yahara Pride Farmers one free site visit ($1,000 value) to discuss and brainstorm project design considerations, possible alternatives and permitting requirements. Contact Andy Skwor, PE, CPESC at askwor@msa-ps.com to set up a site visit.

Partners in Production offers a corn seed coupon to Yahara Pride Farmers, which is good for $50 off per unit of corn. Call AJ Kaltenberg, 608-335-8115, or Jack Kaltenberg, 608-335-2112, if you have any questions or to submit an order.

The R7® Tool by WinField is a comprehensive precision farming solution using satellite imagery that produces variable-rate prescriptions for seed, crop protection, and crop nutrient applications. For all Yahara Pride Farmers, WinField is providing an opportunity to use this technology on every acre of their farm. Please contact Wendall Boehlje at wboehlje@landolakes.com or by phone at 608-575-1763 for more information.
Yahara 2070 aims to help local decision makers, including farmers, think about the long-term and build their capacity to work towards a desirable future. Developed by a team from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Yahara 2070 is a set of scenarios about the Yahara Watershed, set in the year 2070. They are four fictional but scientifically plausible stories—plus modeling data—that depict what life in the watershed could be like if varying social, economic, and environmental changes were to occur over the next three generations.

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Moreover, we, like you, know that today’s problems with water quality are bigger than agriculture. Yahara 2070 is about considering the future, and considering the “really long-term” may improve risk management and decision making, especially when it comes to preserving things farmers care about, like their land. A project called Yahara 2070 aims to help local decision makers, including farmers, think about the long-term and build their capacity to work towards a desirable future.

I know what you might be thinking: 2070? Where is the time to think that far ahead? There is much to consider about the future, and considering the “really long-term” may improve risk management and decision making, especially when it comes to preserving things farmers care about, like their land. A project called Yahara 2070 aims to help local decision makers, including farmers, think about the long-term and build their capacity to work towards a desirable future.

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2015 Watershed-Wide Conference recap

Our 3rd Annual Watershed-wide Conference, “Nutrient Management & Precision Ag”, was a huge success with a full room of over 100 attendees. Read below for highlights from each speaker’s presentation.

Todd Stuntebeck, physical scientist at the U.S. Geological Survey, shared USGS Data Findings from 2014, which can help farmers plan ahead to avoid spreading during times like these when risk is high. The tool shows the 10-day risk of runoff occurring based on precipitation, soil moisture, and individual basin characteristics.

What’s Next for the Yahara WINs Pilot Project

David Taylor, Director of Ecosystem Services at the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) and Director of Special Projects for Yahara WINs, who also serves on the YPF Conservation Board, shared what will be coming next for Yahara WINs as the pilot project wraps up. Yahara WINs is a collaborative approach to reducing phosphorus runoff and a major funding source for cost-share practices, led by MMSD. During the 2016 transition year, Yahara WINs will continue to fund conservation practices as usual. By 2017, it is expected that the full-scale adaptive management project will be in place throughout the watershed, with expanded funding.

New County Harvestable Buffer Cost-share Program

Kevin Connors, Director of the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department, announced a new harvestable buffer cost-share program that will be available to area farmers in 2015. Croplands located in the Yahara and Badfish Creek Watershed that are adjacent to perennial or intermittent streams are eligible. Buffers can be 30 to 120 feet wide, and can qualify for a $400-$450 per acre payment each year depending on the contract length. Contact the Dane County Land Conservation Division for more information at (608) 224-3730.

2014 cost-share results (in acres):

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<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Total 6,277</th>
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<th>845</th>
<th>7,288</th>
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<td>131</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strip Tillage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manure Injection*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7,288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We want to tailor our programs to YOUR needs. What additional practices do you want to see added to our cost-share program? How can Yahara Pride Farms better serve your farm?

Take the survey at yaharapridefarms.org

YPF Cover Crop Test Plot Research Results

Heidi Johnson, Crop and Soils Agent at UW-Madison, provided a report on the economic findings of the 2013-2014 YPF Cover Crop Test Plot. When analyzing the data, Heidi focused on identifying cover crops that paid for themselves both in the short and long run. For more in-depth information on the results of the Cover Crop Test Plot research, please see this month’s Forward Farmer cover article.

WinField’s R7 Satellite Imagery Tool

Wrapping up the conference was Wendall Boehlje, Agriculture Technology Specialist at WinField, a division of Land O’ Lakes. Wendall presented information on a satellite imagery tool called the R7 that helps farmers detect field data. Through this technology, farmers are able to increase their efficiency by using zone maps generated by field data to place crop hybrids where they will perform best.

Thank you for helping make the 3rd Annual Watershed-wide Conference a valuable learning opportunity. We especially want to thank our speakers, the farmers who attended, and our generous sponsors: Badgerland Financial, Dairy Business Association, Dairy Business Milk Marketing Cooperative, Wisconsin Soybean Marketing Board, Digested Organics, Carl F. Statz & Sons, Wagner Insurance, Willy Street Co-op, and Yahara WINs.

Cover Crops, cont.

that the cover crop can be harvested in late October for forage. The peas and barley mix that Endres Berryridge Farms plants after winter wheat yields between one and a half to two tons of dry matter forage per acre. Jeff said, “The stubble and plant mass left behind after the cover crop harvest acts as a good cover for holding the soil and nutrients in place for the winter months, which opens the opportunity to no-till corn, soybeans or alfalfa the following spring.” Jeff also stated, “We like the barley best because it is fast growing, and has good feed quality. The pea and barley forage is fed to replacement heifers and helps lower feed costs by allowing us to use less high quality haylage.” The Endres brothers have gotten positive yield results from corn, soybean and alfalfa following the cover crops, with corn being the most successful.

Sparked by the cost-share assistance provided through Yahara Pride Farms, the Endres brothers have been using the peas and barley combination of cover crops for three years now. Jeff said the cost-share program allowed them to experiment and try new things with cover cropping, which helped them find a good combination for feed and yield results. He also stated that cover crops give us an opportunity to tie up nutrients in soil through living plants, which is then released and available to be used by crops in the spring. Endres Berryridge Farms has increased acres of cover crops over the years leading to improved crop yields. The pea and barley forage is fed to replacement heifers leading to improved crop yields.

Greg Ziegler, Ziegler Dairy

Greg said it has been a “very positive experience working with Yahara Pride Farms through the cost-share program” and that the program “gave him the opportunity to make a change.” Ziegler Dairy started using cover crops through the Yahara Pride Farms cost-share offering in 2012. They planted forty acres of winter rye and now have continued to increase their acres each year, planting a total of 350 acres last fall.

As far as soil health, Greg noticed when he drove in with the planter the next year the ground seemed “so much softer.” On the knolls and hills he saw no visible washing.

Prior to planting cover crops, Greg used to only maintain three to four weeks of manure storage and had to haul more frequently. Now he has increased storage and he thinks that the reduction in hauling, in combination with the cover crops, has resulted in a significant decrease in field compaction and faster soil warm up in the spring, leading to improved crop yields.

We are excited that farmers are seeing positive results and we thank all of the farms that participated in our cost-share program for the last three years. Thanks to the dedicated Yahara Pride Farmers, we are able to report acres far beyond what we cost-share each year.

We want to thank Yahara WINs, who provides the majority of funding for our cost-shared practices. We also want to specially thank Kalscheur Implement Co. Inc. and McFarlames’, who match our cost-share with discounted rentals to Yahara Pride Farmers.
Yahara Pride Farms has come a long way since we formed in 2011. In January, the Yahara Pride Farms board got together to update how we represent who we are and what we do. We hope that when you read about what we strive to do, you’ll see that our goals are similar to yours.

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There has been a lot of discussion happening on cover crops statewide and regionally. We know cover crops are used to manage soil erosion between normal crop rotations, but do cover crops pay? What seed types are most effective? Do cover crops increase yields? Management methods, planting dates, seed types, timing and weather all play a part. In an effort to answer these important questions and evaluate these variables, Yahara Pride Farms (YPF) offers cost-share assistance for farmers to try out different cover crops and is also working on a cover crop demonstration plot in partnership with UW-Extension’s crop and soils educator, Heidi Johnson and seed company Partners in Production.

What we’ve learned so far
According to Heidi, by effectively managing a cover crop, farmers will see a reduction in soil erosion and long-term improvements in soil condition, which can result in increased yields, reduction in nitrogen fertilizer need and higher yields in years with environmental stresses. In the short-term, cover crops can provide nitrogen credits and take up nitrogen that could be lost to leaching, which can allow for an increased subsequent crop yield and improved soil health.

Through the cover crop demonstration plot, we have found that one of the most important factors to consider when planting cover crops is timing. The earlier you get your cover crops in after corn silage, the better. Planting cover crops before manure application after silage harvest works very well. Additionally, with low soil disturbance manure injection systems we can apply manure after the cover crop has been established.

In 2015, the demonstration plot will be looking at the effects of cutting back on cover crop seed rates (full, ¾ and ½ rates) and eliminating the variable planting dates that we evaluated in 2014. The seed types that will be evaluated this year will be rye, wheat, oats, barley and the combination of barley and winter wheat.

To share information learned from planting cover crops with our farmer network we interviewed Jeff Endres of Endres Berryridge Farms and Greg Ziegler of Ziegler Dairy to tell us more about the payoff they’ve seen by trying cover crops through the YPF cost-share program since 2012.

Jeff Endres, Endres Berryridge Farms
The cover crop combination that has been most effective for Endres Berryridge Farms is winter wheat followed by a mixture of peas and barley after the winter wheat is harvested in late summer. The winter wheat acts as a cover crop throughout the winter months, while the peas and barley act as a cover crop for late summer and early fall. The cover crops prepare the field for the next spring’s crop and allow Berryridge Farms to grow three different crops in one year with only tilling the ground once. This also gives the option to incorporate manure after winter wheat harvest.

Using cover crops as forage
Planting cover crops mid- to late-August allows enough growing season...Continued on page 3