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# Good Year to Be a Farmer



Dry land farmer Anton Borg.

**By Jaimee Green**

For a Montana farmer, a lot depends on the weather. That's perhaps because their livelihood depends on it. For one area farmer, Mother Nature was very accommodating this farming season.

Anton Borg of Sidney can't recall any year since he started dry land farming back in 2009, when crops looked this good. With high yields and strong test weights, the season promises to go down in his farm's history as one for the books. "The last few years have been good. But this year we had really adequate moisture and cooler temperatures that really created ideal conditions for a very good crop," Borg said.

While many farmers around him suffered crop losses to damaging hail, his farmlands were spared.

Located between Bloomfield and Richey, this year's crop rotation consisted of

peas and safflowers. The peas were harvested in early August, and he is just getting into the 800 acres of safflower while his spring and winter wheat are nearing the end of their cutting season. Once complete, he will haul it to Farmers Elevator in Glendive.

With the ideal wetter growing conditions, his wheat is getting to the elevator a few weeks behind last year's schedule since Borg, like other area farmers, had to wait for the fields to dry before cutting.

This year, he anticipates a crop of number one rated green edible peas following an initial sample test while netting 40 bushels per acre. One field ran as high as 70 bushel. He said his safflower is also looking good, testing only 34 pounds, it's still yielding over 1,000 pounds per acre.

Two years ago, Borg introduced a pulse crop of peas to his land in an effort to build nitrogen levels naturally and lower input costs for fertilizer. Peas require little nitrogen fertilizer; instead they fix nitrogen from the air into the soil while helping break disease and pest cycles in wheat, creating several benefits to his operation.

At the same time he added safflower into his crop rotation. His first crop was used primarily for birdseed while this year's oil seed crop was trucked to STI in Fairview and will be used to make cooking oil. Safflower and other oilseeds such as camelina, flax, sunflowers and canola are becoming cash crops good for Montana farmers with the added benefit that they are potentially good for the planet. They can promote human and livestock health, while providing a rotational crop for small grain farmers.

In addition to his own farming operation, Borg also works for area farmers spraying herbicides and chemicals

with his 1,200 gallon, 120 foot self propelled sprayer. During the busy spray season he covers fields from Sidney to west of Bloomfield and as far as 50 miles west of Fairview.


For Borg, part of the enjoyment of being a farmer is rooted in the opportunity to do many different things. "One day you work in the shop. The next day you're in the fields. I have always loved being outdoors and I enjoy the freedom of deciding how you spend your day," he said.

This year, there were challenges along the way. With the favorable moisture came the unfavorable hassles of working in the mud. Nearly half-a-dozen times he found his sprayer stuck in the sopping soil. "Some days there was just no bottom and you kept sinking. We had to use a backhoe and railroad ties for traction. And pretty soon you were stuck again. It's very frustrating when you know you have people depending on you to get their fields done," Borg said.

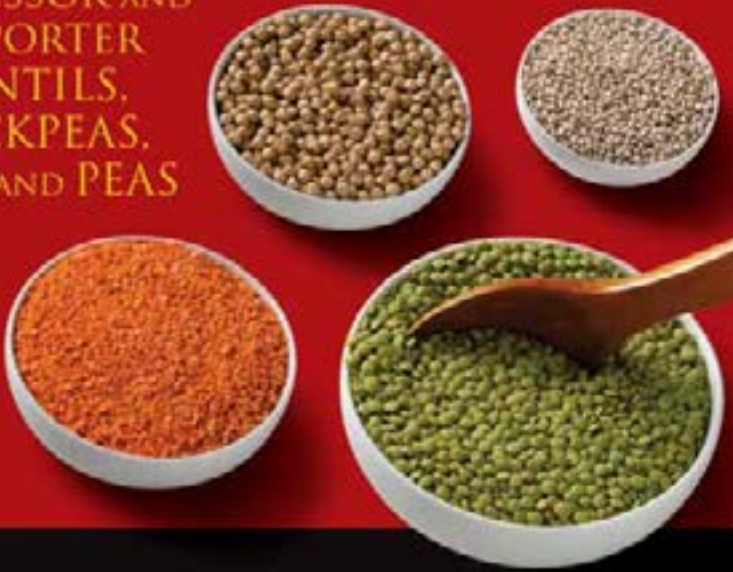
This season, he sprayed nearly 20,000 acres.

While many farmers are sighing in relief as the harvest season winds down, their relaxation is short lived as many will begin planting winter wheat. In an effort to relieve the workload next spring Borg plans to plant 1,000 acres of winter wheat by the end of October in the hopes of matching this year's yield of 50 bushels per acre during the next growing season.

Borg comes from a family of farmers starting with his father Lars, a wheat and safflower farmer. His uncle Milo was also a farmer as well as his brother-in-law, Kirk Miller, who grows irrigated crops such as sugar beets. Borg began his own farming operation following the death of his uncle Malcolm Senner, in 2008. He and his dad essentially took over his uncle's plots of land in an



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effort to keep the farm going for his aunt Marlene. "I really attribute the inspiration I had to starting my own farming operation to my aunt. She had a lot of opportunities to rent the land to someone else but instead she gave the opportunity to me," Borg said.

He attributes the success he has had with his operation to his dad, his friends James Kelly, Ben Larsen and others who he said have all helped him along the way. "It just wouldn't work with me on my own. Their support is what has made me successful," he said.

Right: Borg with his spraying equipment.



Combine being driven by Lars Borg, Anton's father.



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# Sugarbeet Harvest Wrapping Up Soon

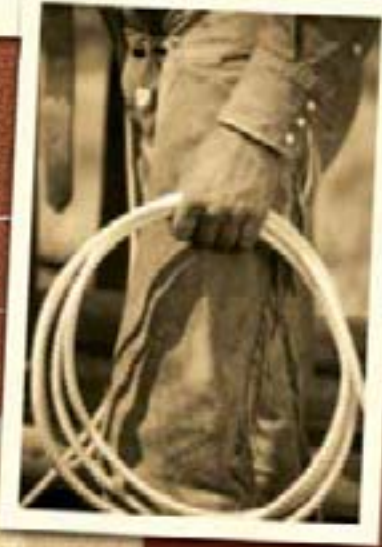




Above: Harvesting beets on Don Steinbeisser, Jr.'s land near Sidney.

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Digging beets for progress and not for sugar, crews work to expand city water south of Sidney.

Sugarbeet harvest 2013 should be completed by the end of this week according to Sidney Sugars agriculturalist Russ Fullmer. Before the heavy rains caused some delays, the crop was 80% harvested. “We broke records for weekly and daily tons with 1 day coming in at over 70,000 tons. The digging was good, the trucks were going, everything was clean and there were no breakdowns,” Fullmer said. “We’re really lucky compared to Western Sugar (in Billings). Some of those growers haven’t been able to dig in 2 weeks. We were really blessed the way it came.” Sidney Sugars has been able to hold the harvest help during the breaks, although some of them have left. “It’s just about done for them. Some are ready to go and get away from the chilly temperatures,” he said with a chuckle.

With each digging day, 4 or 5 more growers get done. Culbertson finished up October 12 and Powder River was all done by October 17.

Tonnage surpassed earlier estimates, coming in at an average of 27.2 tons per acre. However, no one is happy about the sugar content which is averaging 16.5. “It’s not the best,” Fullmer said. “I don’t know how it will compare to the average in the industry.”

Sugar prices are also down this fall with the lowest prices the industry has seen since the 80s. Various factors including a huge crop last year, and excess sugar coming in from Mexico have contributed to the lower prices. “Next year might be great,” Fullmer said. “Since I’ve been in the business, it’s been a roller coaster.”

As always, Sidney Sugars spent the months between campaigns doing maintenance and capital improvements. A new, bigger beet elevator was installed to replace the old undersized one. “The old one had to work too hard. They wear out fast,” Fullmer explained. A big project underway now involves improving the waste water treatment. Sidney Sugars is exploring different technology to better clean and treat all the waste water the plant generates. “We’ve also done a lot of work to the boilers, making them more efficient,” Fullmer said. The plant has 2 coal and 1 gas fired burners. Work on those will probably continue next summer.

Sidney Sugars continues to remind everyone to drive defensively, be courteous, and get through the remainder of harvest safely.



# Join In The Harvest Festival Celebration...

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Enter or just sample the tasty treats at our Make It With Sugar Contest Friday morning at Reese & Ray's IGA. Area merchants have some fantastic specials this week as well.

Please take some time to check out our special tribute to the agriculture industry. We would like to thank Sidney Sugars Incorporated, everyone who agreed to let us do stories about them, and our advertisers, without whom this section would not be possible.

We salute the entire farming community and congratulate you on another successful harvest.

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Robbie Stepan  
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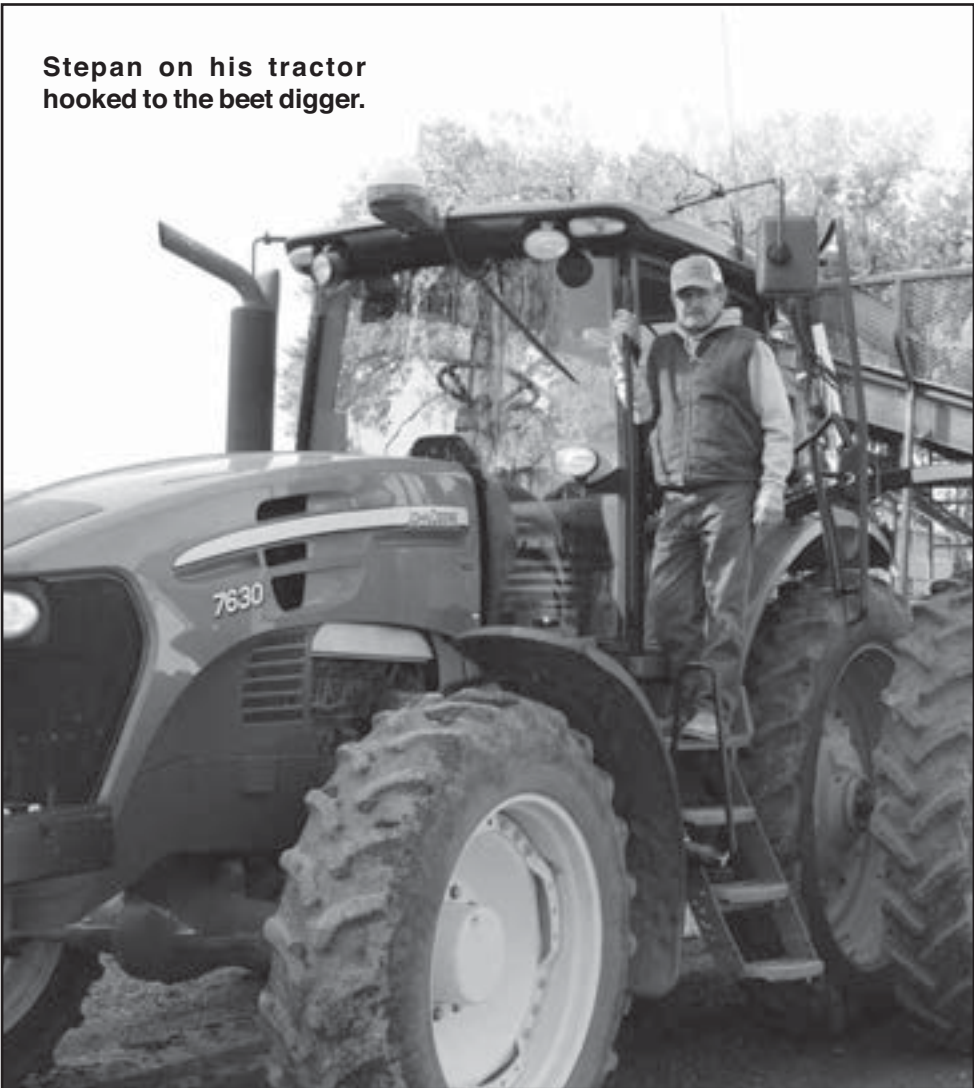
**By Brenda Mehling**  
They say that farming is not just a job, but a way of life. This has certainly been true for 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Fairview sugar beet farmer Robbie Stepan. As Stepan reflects on his last 41 years of farming, and experiences his final beet harvest, his feelings expressed of retirement are

bittersweet. Stepan has always enjoyed beet harvest and says that he couldn't ask for a better one than this year's. However, Stepan has not been able to say that about every harvest and remembers some very wet years, prolonging harvest. "One year, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October,

we had 11 inches of snow." Stepan also recalls his first beet harvest in 1972, when the area received about six inches of snowfall. Farming has been a lifestyle and career that Stepan feels very fortunate to have had, but he is looking forward to shedding the associated stress.

**Continued on next page.**

Stepan on his tractor hooked to the beet digger.



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Wed.....Dec 11th.....	Calf Special & All Class Cattle Sale .....	9am
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Stepan with his wife, Anita, digging beets in 1972.




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Digging beets in 1982.

Stepan always knew he wanted to be a farmer. “Even when I was a kid, I knew I wanted to farm. If I could have

quit school in the 4th grade to farm, I would have,” he said laughing. Like many other farm boys, Stepan didn’t enjoy school. Regardless, he graduated from Fairview High School in 1967; then enlisted in the Navy and served our country in the Vietnam War.

After serving four years, Stepan came home in 1972, bringing with him Anita, a beautiful lady that he had met in Seattle at a naval radio station after returning from Vietnam. Anita and Robbie were wed shortly after and she became a natural farm wife. Stepan followed his father’s and grandfather’s footsteps by farming sugar beets. Some years later, Stepan and his wife started a family and raised their son and daughter on the farm.

Stepan’s beloved wife, Anita, passed away in the spring of 2012. He maintains that he feels very lucky to have had 40 years of wonderful memories with her on the farm. “She spoiled me rotten,” he said, remembering her firing up the wood stove to warm his feet when he came in from the cold during beet harvest and always welcoming him with a hot meal.

Stepan has seen many changes in farming since he began in 1972. “Machinery wise, everything is three times bigger,” Stepan said. “I started out using a small tractor with no cab.” Now

days, tractors have enormous horsepower, with air conditioners, GPSs, and many other luxuries.

Stepan also noted that “Input costs are so much higher and people are spending so much more.” The cost of fuel, machinery, help, and other expenditures continue to rise. However, the rising cost has also been met with good marketing prices, making the higher expenditures worthwhile.

Farming takes faith and patience. Stepan admits that he was lucky to get into farming in the early 70s when the commodity prices were good. However, prices later plummeted. Stepan said, “In farming, it cycles and you just accept it.” Some years were financially better than others. As a result, there were several years Stepan took on a winter job to help pay for expenses.

Farming comes with a lot of hard work and long hours, not allowing Stepan much opportunity to travel over the years. In retirement, he is looking forward to fulfilling his desire to travel. Despite Stepan’s choice to retire, he concludes, “I feel like the luckiest person in the world. I served in the military, met my wife, was married for 40 wonderful years, and raised two great kids, while farming.” That is certainly a career that anyone can hang their hat on.

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# Harvest Festival Coloring Contest

Left: Dani Berry, 4<sup>th</sup> grader at East Fairview Elementary, earned the top award in our Art Contest. Berry will receive her artwork back, nicely framed, along with an art kit.

Right: Railyn Herbst, a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Central Elementary, received second place and a McDonald's gift certificate.

Below: Cole Wiidanen, a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at East Fairview Elementary, received third place and a McDonald's gift certificate.



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Rory Cozzens, 4<sup>th</sup> grader at East Fairview Elementary, received honorable mention and a gift certificate from McDonald's.



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# Sugarbeet Decorating Contest Winners



Baylee Schlothauer, age 10, took first place with her “Race car”.

A record number of creatively decorated sugar beets made judging this year’s contest a huge challenge. Thank you to everyone who entered!

Special thanks go to Fairview Super Valu for hosting the event and providing great prizes, and to the Powder Keg for always being so generous.

Honorable mentions go to Emma Bieber, age 6, with her “Princess” beet; Jade Schlothauer, age 11, with her “Magnificent Red Fish”; Dani Berry age 9, with “American Superhero” and Britta Paulsen, age 7, with Princess BEETrice”.

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**Wheat Harvest/Double Crop Soybean Planting:** A stripper header enables the farmer to harvest between 1 and 2 weeks earlier than normal at higher moisture (up to 35%) and then plant the new soybeans earlier into the stripped straw. Stripped straw provides a significantly more favorable planting environment because the planter no longer has to penetrate a thick mat of chopped straw left by a conventional cutter bar header. Significantly better seed to soil contact can be expected, which in turn leads to better germination.

Earlier cereal harvest = 1) Better quality wheat  
2) Earlier double crop bean planting 3) Higher soybean yields

**Lodged and Weather Damaged Crops:** Because of the rearwards rotation of the stripping rotor it is able to pick hauled and lodged crops up off of the ground. Under such conditions straw intake is kept low and so both productivity and crop recovery are both significantly improved.



No-till beans in Wheat Straw

**Harvesting Grass Seed:** Grass seed growers from all over the world have embraced the Shelbourne Header as far and away the most efficient way of harvesting almost every variety of grass and flower. Because all of the stem and trash is left in the field the combine no longer has to contend with trying firstly to thresh the seed and then separate it. With a stripper header all the combine does is put the seed into the grain tank. This all means higher yields, cleaner seed and more than 100% faster harvesting rates.



No-till corn in Wheat Straw

**Dryland Wheat Residue/Moisture Management:** Rather than leaving the field shaven bare as with a conventional header a stripper header leaves standing residue. This standing straw has tremendous conservational value. Moisture conservation through snow trap and ground shading have come to mean the difference between a successful crop and a failure for many farmers. Standing straw provides an ideal no-till planting environment and is often utilized when in a wheat, corn, fallow rotation.



The Shelbourne Header has been developed to reduce the amount of straw being taken into the combine and significantly increase its capacity.



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Erin Shannon, age 11, earned second place with her "Porcupine".

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Paul Hardy, age 10, won third place with his “Frankenstein”.

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Caelan O'Brien, a first grader, won first with his "Angler Fish".



Brock Schlothauer, age 7, took second with his "Pig dath sideous".



Jeffrey Tjelde, age 8, earned third place with his "Mummy"

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Landon Tveit, age 5, won second with his “Wicked Witch”.



Macy Tjelde, age 5, took third with her “Kitty Cat”.



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Gavin O'Brien, a kindergartner, earned first with his "Tiki Tiki Man".

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# Cover Crops; Research Continues

By Jaimee Green

Cover crops have been around for a long time. Until recent years, no one gave them much thought. That is changing.

According to Ann Ronning, Roosevelt County Extension Agent, the concept of cover crops dates back hundreds of years. "It really went by the wayside after WWII with the development of synthetic fertilizers and chemicals. Prior to the War, cover crops were used to help prevent soil erosion and to add fertility to the soil," she said.

Today, researchers are looking at the potential benefits of going back to natural solutions. In Northeast Montana, research is underway.

In a joint two-year project on cover crops between the Eastern Ag Research Center, Sidney, and MSU Northern Ag Research Center, hHavre, Mont, experts are gauging the potential benefits of incorporating cover crops into the family farm crop rotation during the time they would normally leave the land bare.

The project is being funded through the Natural Resources Conservation

Service.

"We are trying to determine which crops work best by combining varying cocktail blends of legumes, cereals, root crops and others to see which ones have the best potential for aiding in soil health while increasing biomass," said Dr. Darren Boss, Montana State University NARC Superintendant and Beef Specialist.

The research is taking place near Havre using 16 different cover crop mixtures of radish, oats, turnips, barley and legumes that encompass warm, cool and warm/cool blend species planted and terminated in three different ways. Some are terminated with chemical, some are swathed and baled for cattle and some are grazed with steers. This will help determine how the crops interact with the soil and how next year's spring and winter wheat protein and test weights look after being planted directly behind the cover crop.

There is also additional research being conducted at the Froid Research Farm with the EARC, in Sidney.

The goal of cover crop-

ping is to avoid bare soil between cash crop plantings.

Cover crops are generally grouped according to their botanical classification. Two groups of plants, grasses and legumes, account for most of the plant species used in lieu of fallow. But, there are other excellent crops that do not fall into these categories that offer a wide range of benefits to a farming system, including mustards, forage radishes and sunflowers.

So, what exactly are the best cover crop mixtures for farmers in Northeast Montana looking for ground coverage year round? That's still debatable. The truth is, while some experts have some ideas about what crops handle the dry, arid conditions best, the research behind it is still underway. Yet, crops that predominately do well in the area that require shorter growing periods or are more acclimated to the harsher conditions such as peas, lentils, millet, turnips, radishes, soybeans and safflower may be some good cover crop choices.

Boss said that while most farmers in the Golden

Continued on page 20.



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Dr. Darrin Boss speaking at the EARC Field Day in July.



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The cover crop study test plot near the EARC building in Sidney.

Continued from page 18.

Triangle still rotate their crops with fallow, some are beginning to look into the potential benefits of cover crops for grazing and haying as well as improving the health of the soil by increasing organic matter. In Northeast Montana, very few farmers are experimenting with cover crops.

When determining what to plant as a cover crop, experts say a mixture is best because each species does something different to the soil. Legumes will fixate nitrogen into the soil, broadleaves will add nitrogen as they decompose, turnips and radishes will break up the soil adding air and organic matter. Cereals can break disease cycles and root crops can also open fissures for more moisture penetration.

Successful use of cover crops can offer many benefits such as reducing the impact of wind and water passing over the soil surface to reduce erosion. It can improve the condition of the soil and suppress weeds because it competes for light, water and nutrients. It can also provide a diverse cropping system that creates habitat for animals and beneficial insects.

Side benefits can even include improved trafficability of fields and reduced compaction, enhanced aesthetics and potential for animal feed production. Improved soil, over time, may improve crop yields, leaving the farmer with higher profits as well.

“When selecting a cover crop mixture it should include warm season grasses, cool season grasses, warm season broadleaves, cool season broadleaves and legumes,” Ronning said.

Obviously, no one cover crop is going to accomplish all of those goals, or even a majority of them. It’s up to farmers to study the situation in their fields and decide what they want to accomplish because each of the specific potential benefits requires a different seeding program. Next, they need to plan the specific planting time, the specific type of cover crop, and the specific harvest method and time to end the cover crop. Farmers also should consider the challenges of cover crops, expense and the extra time in the field required.

There are some challenges to replacing fallow with cover crops. First, there is a lack of moisture in the growing season especially late in the season. Secondly, if the cover crop is planted following another crop, there is a shortened growing season ahead of cold temperatures.

“After all of this research we may find out that cover crops are not a good fit for this area. In the past two years since that this research began, this area has experienced unique weather conditions that may be attributable to cover crops success,” Boss said.

On average this area receives 12 to 14 inches of precipitation a year.

“The moral of the story is that after all of this research, whether or not cover crops are a good fit for Montana will boil down to water use and deep soil moisture. It is always easier to take fertilizer and soil to plants than it is water,” Boss said.

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