

A Silver Creek Reflection

No-Cost Critical Area Planting

The Background

Silver Creek growers and land owners are working to improve their operations, while improving the soil and runoff water quality. The Silver Creek team worked with land owners and growers to install critical area plantings (CAPs) in areas where concentrated flow would cause soil erosion. CAPs are a conservation practice where ground cover remains even after crops are harvested, herbicides are applied, or fields are tilled. Different than grassed waterways, CAPs can be driven and planted through.

The Concern

The Silver Creek team was concerned that concentrated flow areas would not be protected due to delayed CAP seeding until after harvest or herbicide spraying would prevent the seed mix from establishing prior to winter, especially if the harvest were late and weather conditions did not favor seed growth. There were also several areas that needed CAPs but funding was limited.

The Plan

The Silver Creek team worked with owners and growers whose fields required CAPs and were planted in rye grass or alfalfa, to simply leave in-place the cover to function as a cover crop. This required modifying the herbicide spraying plan to avoid killing-off the desired cover. The owner and growers agreed and the areas meant to remain as CAPs were mapped out, coordinated with the applicator, and not sprayed off after harvest.

The Result



The above photo shows the successful No-Cost CAP where wheat was not sprayed at the desired locations, and CAPs were essentially 'installed' at no-cost.

These high-risk erosional areas were protected by a well-established wheat mixture that can be planted and harvested through.



On another example where the rotation was coming out of alfalfa, the existing alfalfa was sprayed off in all but the locations where CAPs were desired (dark green in above picture), resulting in a well-established conservation practice located in a high-risk erosion area (below picture).



Lessons & Opportunities

Critical area planting conservation practices do not have to be difficult or expensive to install. Simply leaving existing alfalfa or grass mixtures in place by avoiding spraying them with the rest of the field is all that can be required for an installed conservation practice.

Constant established cover is important for depressions and poorly drained areas and the No-Cost CAP is a simple and cost-effective way of implementation.

Utilizing CAPs protects fields from erosion when a grassed waterway is not needed or would not be acceptable to the grower. CAPs can also allow the grower to plant through, which would not reduce the plantable acreage of the field.

Ask your Silver Creek team how this experience could benefit you.

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