

Cover Crops with Donny Hicks

Many of you that frequent LinkedIn may have seen Donny Hicks' recent post about cover crops and how they were helping him deal with flooding issues. This story gives a great clear example of some of the benefits cover crops provide to farming operations. I spoke with Donny to discuss how and why he started planting cover crops and the benefits he was seeing, summarized below.

Donny, a farmer of over 30 years, began planting cover crops in his 20-acre almond orchard in 2021, after working with Seeds for Bees. Since he was already letting vegetation grow in between the rows, this seemed like a clear next step to bring in beneficial plant species to help his orchard. One of the main drives to do this was to improve water infiltration through his sandy loam soil.



Donny told me, "If we can capture water before it runs off, that's a big one for us." For the first-year test he hand seeded the cover crops across all 20 acres! Early in 2022, due to a serious frost, Donny terminated the cover crop earlier than he had hoped. Even with the early termination, he already saw an increase in organic matter by nearly half a percent!

After seeing these benefits just within the first year, Donny was committed to doing it again and, this time, leaving the cover crops to go to bloom (regardless of frost). And he's glad he did! After nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch of rain in January, Donny noticed no pooling within his field, while his neighbor with no cover crop was having major

POLLINATOR PARTNERSHIP

Protect their lives. Preserve ours.



flooding issues. Even after another 2 inches, only small puddles formed that receded within a few hours. The water went straight into the ground. Not only did this prevent massive runoff, Donny is hopeful that the water will stay available for his trees throughout the season.

As we approach bloom, Donny is excited to have the flowers there for his bees. “You walk out into the cover crop right now, it sounds like the bees are working the trees, but there’s no almond bloom.”

Next year, Donny will not qualify for the free Seeds for Bees, but they offer reasonably priced seeds for growers, and Danny is committed to paying for the seeds to continue. “Especially with the way things are now with the price, growers are trying to cut everything they can, but we need to stay motivated to do these practices for the benefits.”

For more information about Seeds for Bees [click here](#).

We really appreciate hearing from growers and the work they are doing. If you’re interested in having your story told, contact bff@pollinator.org