

Continuous Living Cover:
Report on Training
& Educational Opportunities
in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and
Wisconsin
2010 – April 2014

October 1, 2014

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Introduction

Green Lands Blue Waters provides a framework for involvement of organizations and individuals that have a shared objective of increasing continuous living cover on the agricultural landscape; and shared long-term goals of improved farm economies and improved water quality in the Mississippi River, all of its tributaries, and the Gulf of Mexico. The land-grant universities, farmer organizations, non-profit organizations and individuals involved are primarily in the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Louisiana State University, LUMCON (Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium), and The Land Institute in Kansas are also involved, as well as some organizations with wider regional or national reach. Entities participating in the GLBW framework are diverse in their organizational structures and approaches to increasing continuous living cover on the landscape. Some work directly with farmers, and some do not. We have developed a Field Days Database to track field day and workshop offerings relevant to Continuous Living Cover (CLC), by groups that are engaged directly with farmers. This database is a work in progress. We began by collecting information that was readily available online from our partners and associates that have online calendars.

Information sources for this database

- Leopold Center calendar, begun September 2011.
- Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture calendar, begun July 2010.
- Land Stewardship Project calendar, begun August 2012 (but events were posted on MISA calendar prior to Aug. 2012).
- Practical Farmers of Iowa Field Days Catalog; 2011, 2012, and 2013.
- Practical Farmers of Iowa online calendar, begun October 2013.
- Practical Farmers of Iowa brochures and press releases.
- Northeast Iowa Graziers brochures.
- Soil and Water Conservation District brochures.
- Watershed District brochures.
- Grassworks.org online calendar, begun February 2013.
- Illinois Stewardship Alliance online calendar, begun June 2013.
- Personal communication; Agricultural Watersheds Institute, Rural Advantage and Land Stewardship Project.

This database contains records of field days, pasture walks, workshops, conferences and webinars that meet the following criteria:

1. Relevant to at least one of the five Continuous Living Cover strategies promoted by Green Lands Blue Waters (<http://greenlandsbluwaters.net/strategies/clc>): agroforestry, biomass, cover crops, perennial forages, perennial grains; cropping systems that incorporate one or more

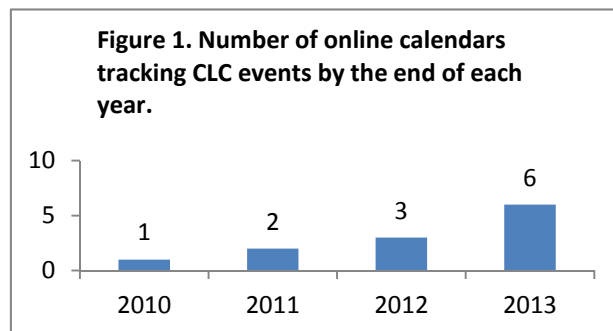
of those strategies; or placement of CLC crops on the landscape.

2. Took place in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, or Wisconsin from the start of 2010 through April 2014.
3. Had farmers as the primary audience; or at minimum were accessible to farmers and provided information on farm-level implementation of practices.
4. Presented techniques or information relevant to implementation of Continuous Living Cover at a field scale. (Events dealing with yards, gardens, small-scale orchards or vineyards, or small-holdings were not included in this database.)

Caveats:

1. The database is by no means a complete list of all field days and workshops that have taken place in MN, IA, WI, and IL. It is limited by availability of online information about field days: some events with relevant topics are advertised strictly locally via mailings or locally-maintained email lists, and we don't have a good way to capture all of those.

2. As mentioned above, this database is compiled from readily-available online data from organizations' calendars of events, or from direct communication with organizations that sponsor events. Pre-2012 events are under-represented due to minimal online calendar sources prior to 2012.



3. The number of co-sponsoring organizations is almost certainly under-reported. In some cases there were several versions of press releases for the same event, each reporting different co-sponsors for the same event. In some cases an organization was not listed as a formal co-sponsor, but it contributed a presenter for the event. In cases where information was provided about presenters, the presenter's organization was marked as a contributor in our database – but it is likely that we missed some of those situations.
4. The database is most complete for Minnesota and Iowa. This is because those states each have two organizations, one university-based and one community-based, that regularly track events in an online calendar and that communicate with each other, so that few events are missed.

Events Database Information

Total number of field days and other events in the database as of April 30, 2014: 351

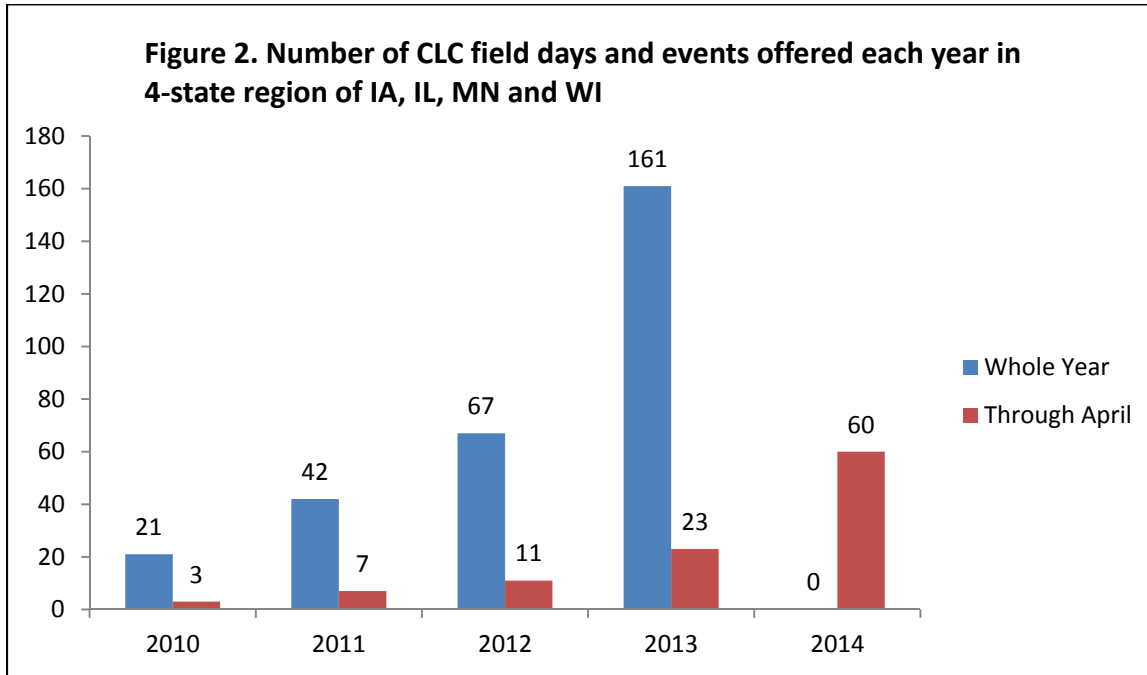
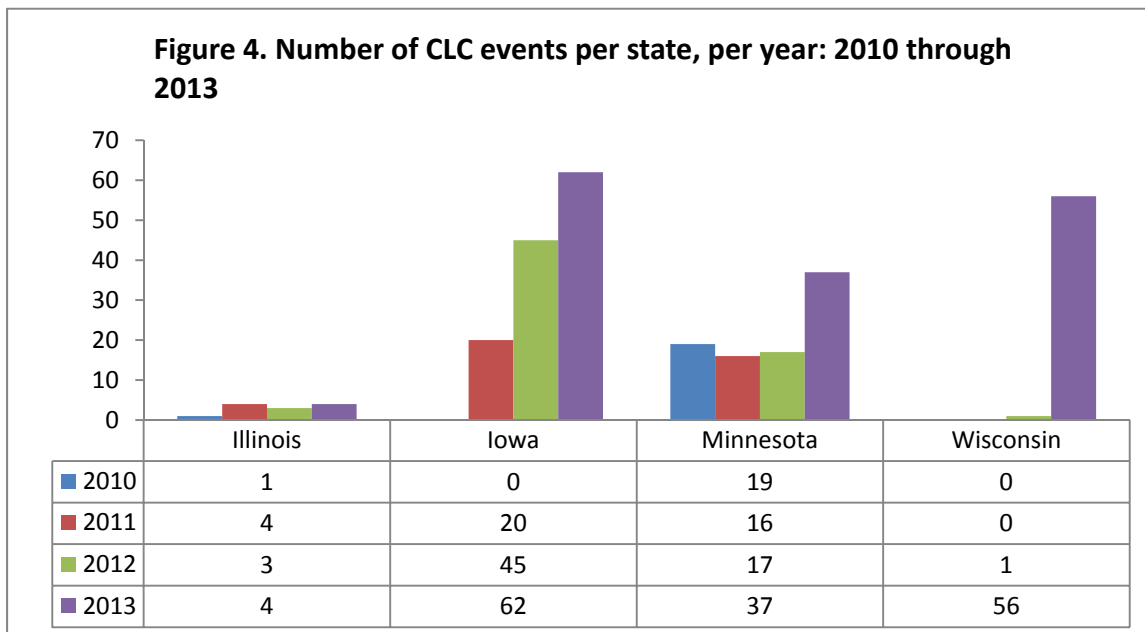
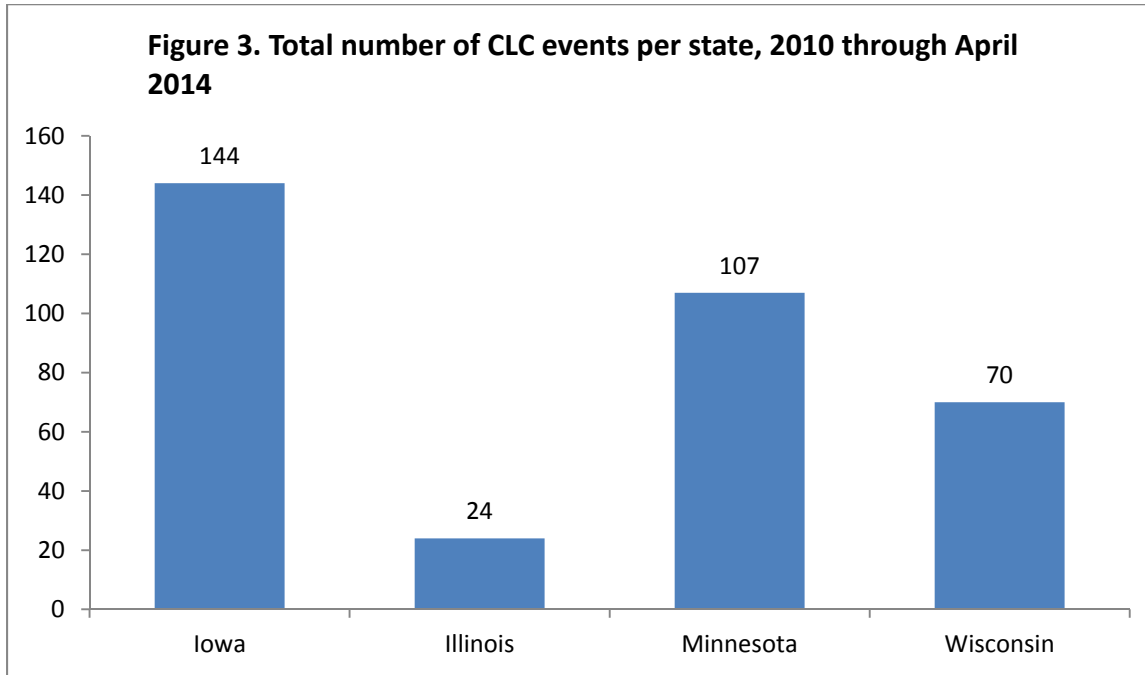


Figure 2 includes all events in the database. Blue columns show whole-year numbers, and red columns show numbers through the month of April.

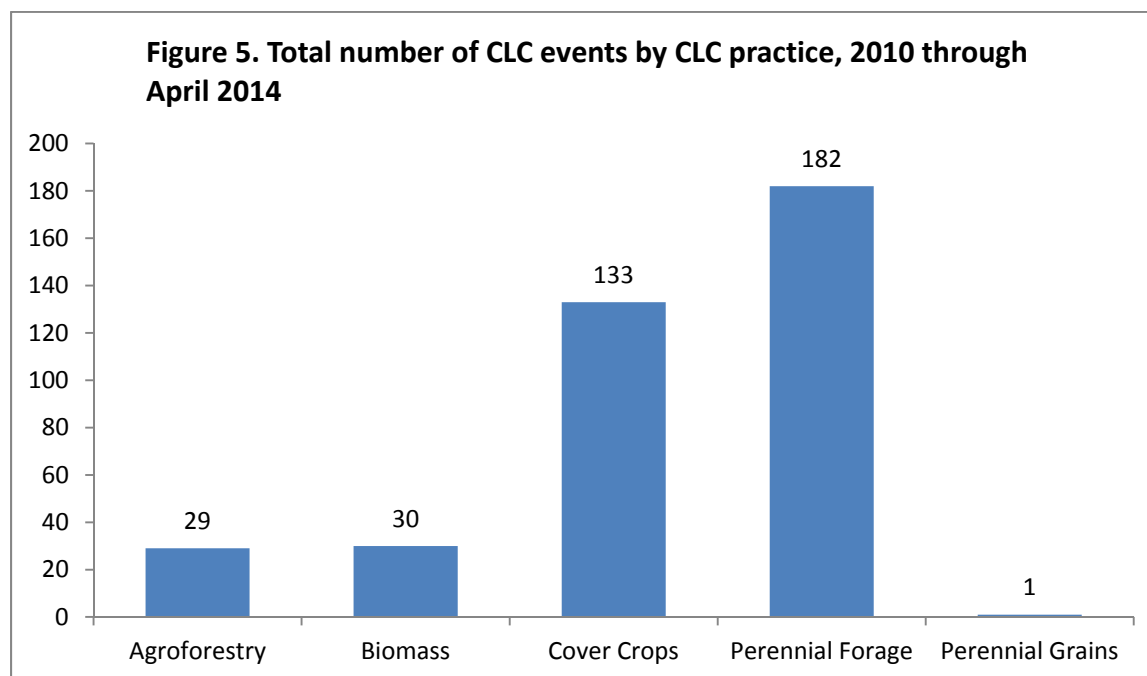
Continuous Living Cover Events by State

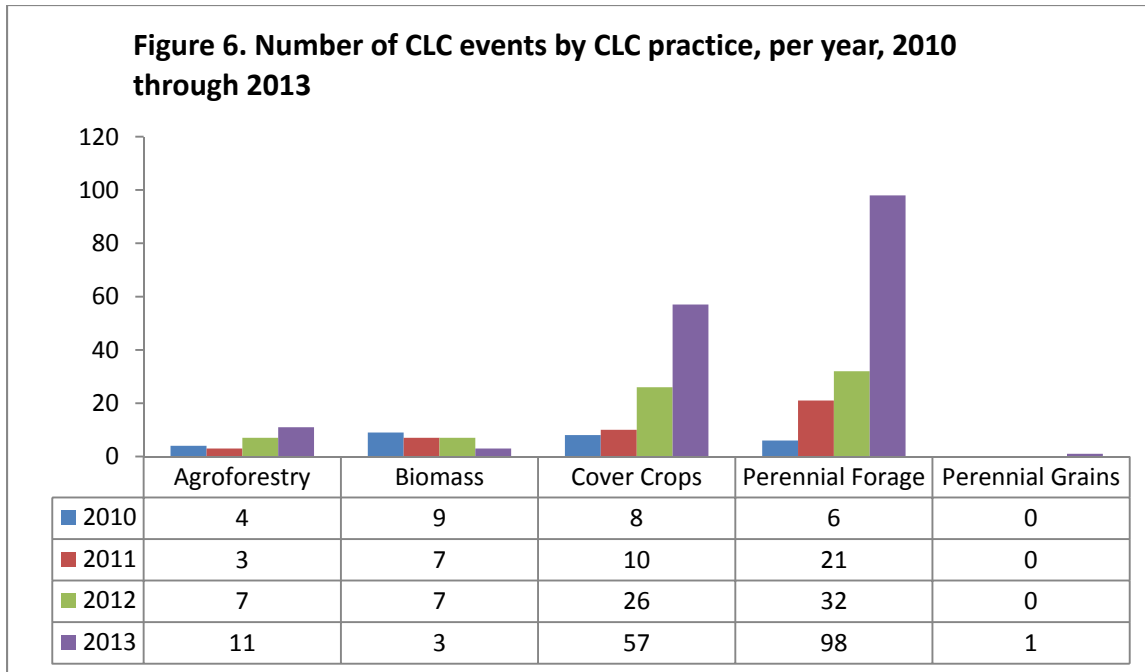


Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the breakdown of CLC events and trends in CLC events by state. Across the 4-state region, the number of CLC events has increased each year and the rate of increase has also accelerated from 2010 to 2013. Based on data through April of 2014, shown in Figure 2, the upward trend appears likely to continue in 2014.

Figure 3 shows that Iowa has seen the largest number of CLC events over the time period covered by the database, with Minnesota second. These totals are partially an artifact of the availability of online data: Iowa and Minnesota have online calendar sources that go back prior to 2012, while Illinois and Wisconsin calendar sources are more recent. Figure 4 provides evidence that the actual number of CLC events is increasing, and not merely the reporting of those events. The reporting capacity in Iowa and Minnesota did not change substantially from 2012 to 2013, but the number of CLC events reported in those states did increase from 2012 to 2013: by 38% in Iowa and by 118% in Minnesota.

Continuous Living Cover Events by Practice





Figures 5 and 6 show the breakdown of CLC events by CLC practice. Perennial forage and cover crops are the most common topics for CLC events (figure 5). Figure 6 shows that the number of perennial forage/grazing events and cover crop events has increased every year since 2010, and the rate of increase appears to be accelerating. There were more biomass-related events in 2010 through 2012 than in 2013 and 2014, and the reverse is true for agroforestry. This in part reflects grant funding cycles. A SARE-PDP grant was awarded in 2012 for development of an Agroforestry Academy with activity in several states, and the increase in Agroforestry events in 2013 is probably related to that. Perennial grains have been a topic of research in the region over the past decade and are just beginning to emerge as a topic of interest to farmers.

Continuous Living Cover Events by State and Practice

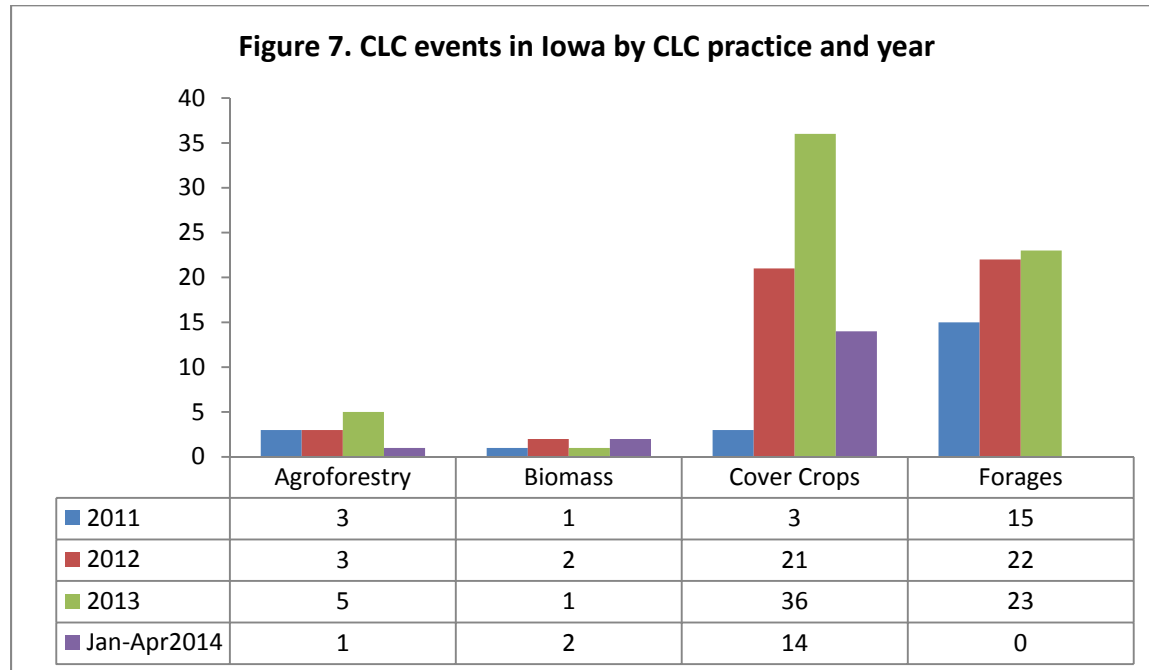
The following tables show recent trends in number of CLC events for Iowa and Minnesota, which had established online calendars prior to the start of 2012. Total numbers of CLC events are shown for Illinois and Wisconsin.

Iowa

Total field days and workshops in the database: 144

Topic	# of events through April 2014
Agroforestry	12
Biomass	6
Cover Crops	74
Perennial Forage/Grazing	60
Perennial Grain	0

Note: The total summed over CLC practices is higher than the overall total due to nine multiple-topic events.



We have no record of Iowa events prior to 2011. The Practical Farmers of Iowa events catalog was available beginning in 2011, and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University began its online calendar in September of 2011.

Figure 7 shows that interest in cover crops increased sharply in Iowa between 2011 and 2013. Interest in forages rose during the same time period, but less dramatically. No forages field days had yet been recorded for 2014 by the end of April.

Illinois

Total field days and workshops: 24

Table 2. Illinois: number of field days and workshops, by Continuous Living Cover practice:	
Topic	# of events through April 2014
Agroforestry	0
Biomass	6
Cover Crops	18
Perennial Forage/Grazing	1
Perennial Grain	0
The total summed over CLC practices is higher than the overall total due to one multiple-topic event.	

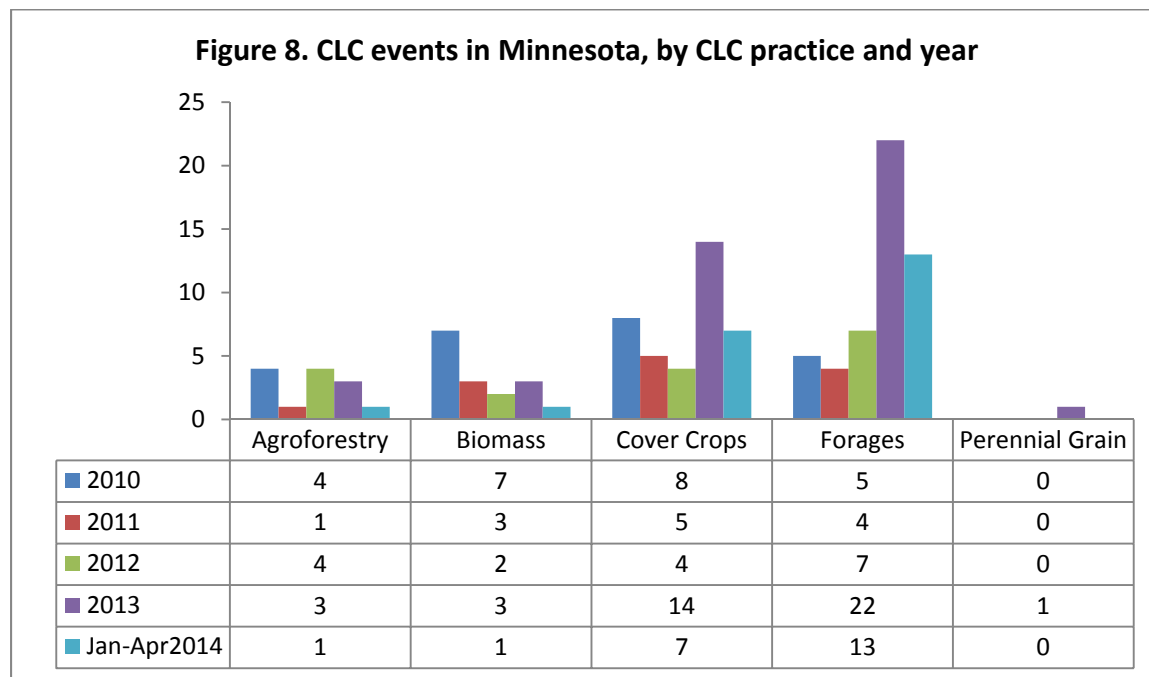
The Illinois Stewardship Alliance added an event calendar in June of 2013, which made it possible to track events in Illinois. The number of CLC events in Illinois is still likely to be under-reported. Cover crops were the most popular CLC topic for recorded events in Illinois, followed by biomass.

Minnesota

Total field days and workshops: 107

Topic	# of events through April 2014
Agroforestry	13
Biomass	16
Cover Crops	38
Perennial Forage/Grazing	51
Perennial Grain	1

The total summed over CLC practices is higher than the overall total due to 15 multiple-topic events.



The Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture began an online event calendar in 2010, which along with event lists from Rural Advantage and Land Stewardship Project enabled us to track events in Minnesota farther back in time than in the other states.

Figure 8 shows that Minnesota has seen fluctuating numbers of agroforestry and biomass events, but a strong increase in cover crop and perennial forage/grazing events from 2012 to 2013. Based on data through April of 2014, interest in cover crop and perennial forage/grazing events remains strong.

Wisconsin

Total field days and workshops: 70

Topic	# of events through April 2014
Agroforestry	4
Biomass	0
Cover Crops	2
Perennial Forage/Grazing	65
Perennial Grain	0
The total summed over CLC practices is higher than the overall total due to one multiple-topic event.	

GrassWorks.org launched an online calendar in February of 2013, which made it possible to track grazing events in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is likely under-reported for CLC events on topics other than perennial forages/grazing. Perennial forages/grazing is clearly a very popular topic in Wisconsin.

Multiple-topic CLC events

Wisconsin: 1

Minnesota: 15

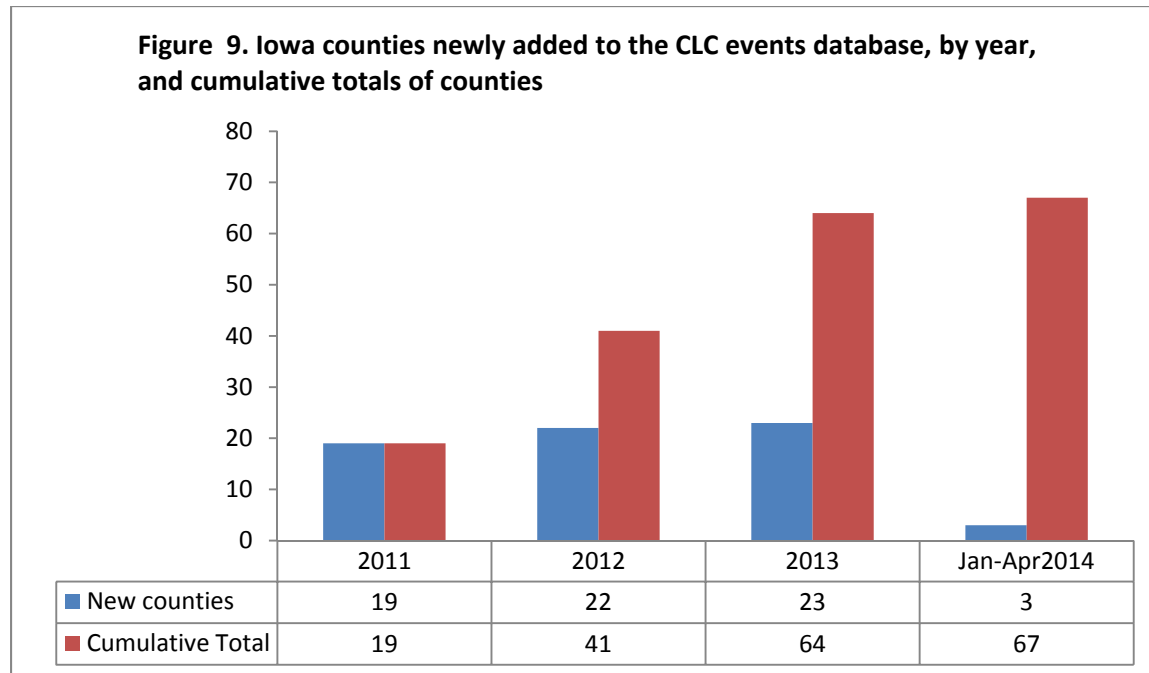
Iowa: 9

Illinois: 1

There were 26 multi-topic events out of 351 total events, which is 7% of total events. A shared objective of many groups involved in the GLBW framework is to intensify CLC by increasing the number of types of CLC practices on the ground in a given area. The hypothesis is that there are synergies among the CLC practices, and that “stacking” multiple practices on a single farm or within a single watershed will accomplish more than single practices toward achieving the goals of improved farm economies and improved water quality. Green Lands Blue Waters was awarded a SARE-PDP grant for a project titled, “Integrating Continuous Living Cover into farming systems through professional development.” The PDP project is addressing the “stacking” of multiple CLC practices on individual farms and within watersheds. An expected short-term outcome of that project and related efforts will be an increase in the number of multiple-topic CLC events offered in the region.

Geographic Spread of Continuous Living Cover Events within States

Iowa

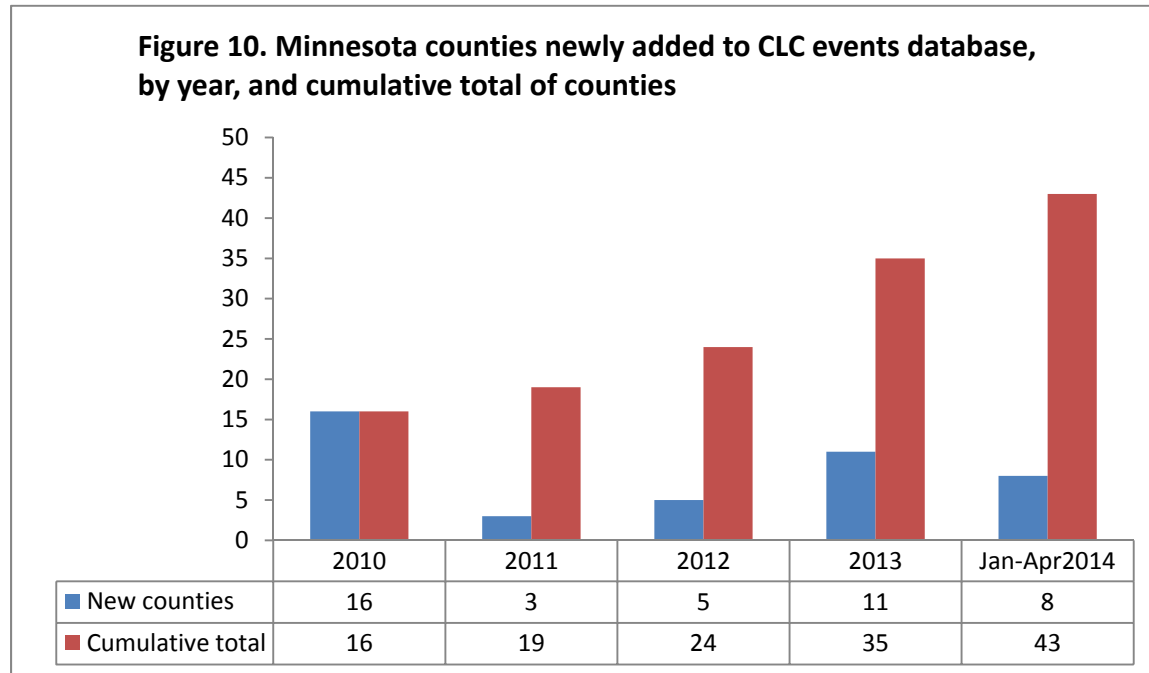


There are 99 counties in Iowa. Continuous Living Cover (CLC) field days and workshops in Iowa were offered in 64 counties (65% of counties) from 2010 through 2013. CLC field days and workshops were offered in an additional three new counties from January through April 2014, for a total of 67 counties (68% of counties). Number of events per county ranged from one to nine, with an average of 2.2 events per county among the 67 counties that had any CLC events.

Illinois

The CLC events that we recorded took place in 15 Illinois counties. The range of numbers of events in those 15 counties was 1 to 5, with an average of 1.5 per county among the 15 counties that had any CLC events.

Minnesota



Continuous Living Cover (CLC) events in Minnesota tended to be clustered in certain areas to a greater degree than in Iowa. By April of 2014, 43 counties out of 87 in Minnesota (48% of counties) had CLC events; and six of the 43 counties had five or more events. The range of number of events per county was 1 to 11, with an average of 2.6 events per county of the 43 counties with any CLC events.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin has 72 counties. There were CLC events recorded in 31 of those counties (43% of counties). Range of number of events per county was 1 to 14, with an average of 2.6 events per county for the 31 counties with any CLC events. The outlier with 14 events was Marathon County, and many of those were shared with adjacent counties. Shared events were counted in both counties.

Organizations that Sponsor Continuous Living Cover Events

Table 5. Organizations that have sponsored or co-sponsored three or more of the events in the CLC Events Database.	
Organization	Number of events
Agricultural Watershed Institute	6
Central Wisconsin River Graziers	7
Chippewa 10% Project	11
Chippewa River (MN) Watershed District	5
Columbia/Dodge Grazing Network	4
Community Bank	3
DNR (any state)	9
Eastern Iowa Hay Producers	8
Farm Bureau	3
Grassworks	3
Grazing Lands Conservation Association	4
Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative	10
Great River Graziers	12
Iowa Beef Center	17
Iowa Dept. of Agriculture & Land Stewardship	8
Iowa Forage & Grassland Council	4
Iowa Learning Farms	50
Iowa State University & Extension	80
Lake Superior Graziers	3
Land Stewardship Project	30
LCCMR	3
Leopold Center	23
Midwest Forage Association	5
Minnesota Dairy Initiative	6
Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture	5
Minnesota Hazelnut Foundation	4
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	4
National Fish & Wildlife Foundation	3
National Lab for Agriculture & Environment	9
NCR-SARE	11
Northeast Iowa Graziers	14
NRCS	80
North Central Wisconsin Graziers	6
Northwest Wisconsin Graziers	5
Organic Valley Co-op	4
Practical Farmers of Iowa	70
Resource Conservation & Development Councils (any)	21
Rural Advantage	36
Southeast Wisconsin Graziers	4

Table 5 (continued). Organizations that have sponsored or co-sponsored three or more of the events in the CLC Events Database.	
Organization	Number of events
Sustainable Farming Association	13
Soil & Water Conservation District (any)	48
Taylor County (WI) Land Conservation Dept.	5
The Nature Conservancy	5
Trout Unlimited	3
University of Illinois & Extension	7
University of Iowa	3
University of Minnesota & Extension	55
University of Wisconsin & Extension	34
US Fish & Wildlife	3
USDA	5
USDA-ARS	15
Wisconsin Dept. of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection	12

Sponsor or Co-sponsor Organizations by Year

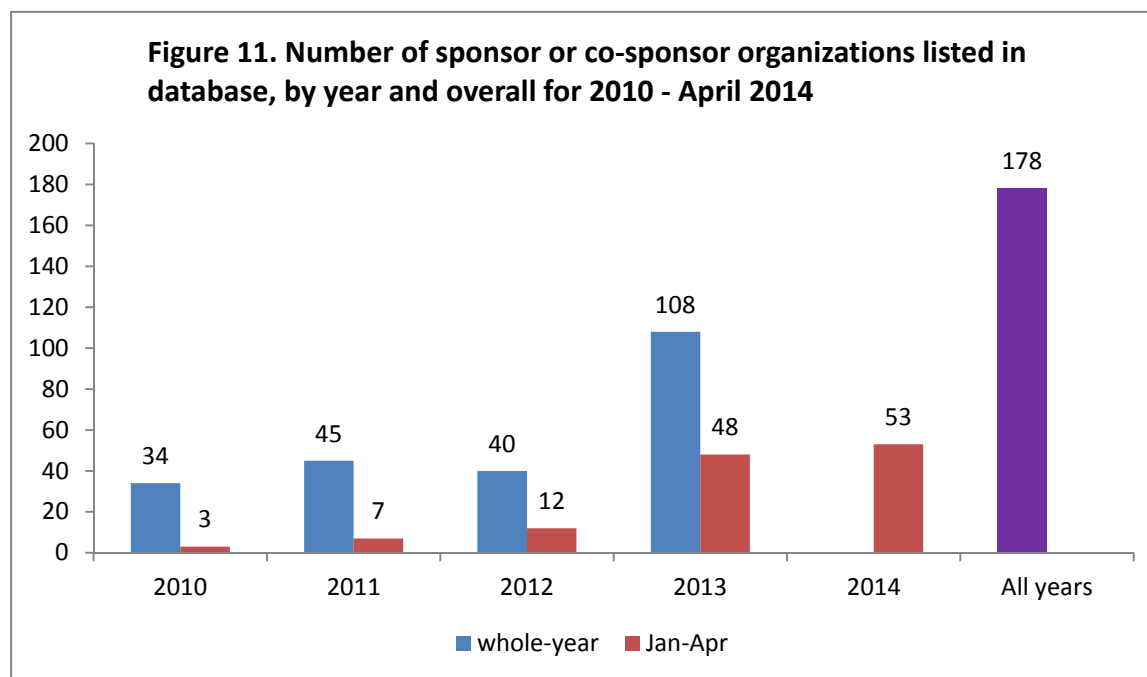
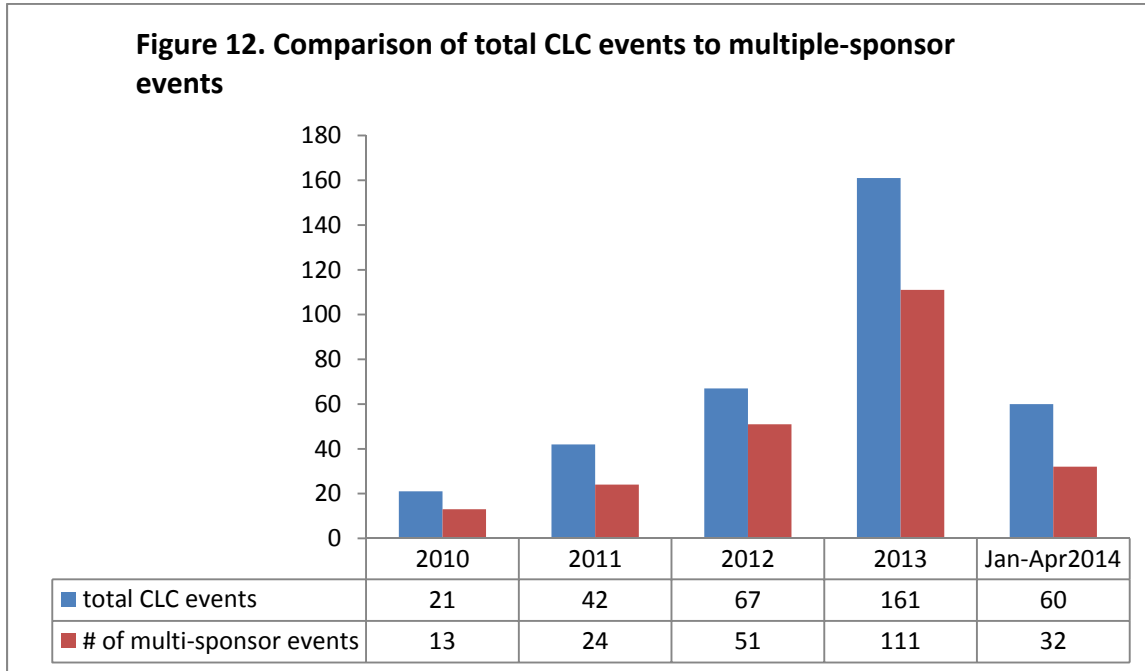


Figure 11 shows the number of organizations sponsoring or co-sponsoring CLC events within each year. Sum of per-year totals is greater than the overall total of 178 organizations, because many organizations sponsor events every year.

The first four months of 2014 saw more sponsoring and co-sponsoring organizations than all of 2010, 2011, or 2012; and 2014 appears to be on track to exceed 2013 for number of organizations involved in CLC events.

Multiple-Sponsor Events



The Green Lands Blue Waters framework includes encouragement for organizations to build networks and collaborative efforts with each other. Collaborative workshop and field day offerings are encouraged. On average over all events in the database, collaborations of two or more groups has occurred for 66% of events. The total number of collaborative incidents, defined as involvement of any group in any multiple-sponsor event, is 841.

Conclusions

1. The number of Continuous Living Cover educational events is increasing in the four-state region of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.
2. The most popular CLC topics for workshop and field day events are cover crops and perennial forage/grazing.
3. Distribution of CLC events is becoming more widespread. In Iowa and Minnesota, the number of counties in which any CLC events have taken place has increased in every year.
4. The number of organizations sponsoring or co-sponsoring CLC training events more than doubled from 2012 to 2013, and appeared on track to increase again in 2014.
5. Collaborative efforts, documented as multiple-sponsor events, make up 66% of the total CLC events in the database.