



Green Lands Blue Waters Partnership  
2012 Conference, 15-16 October  
Memorial Union, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa  
Conference Report

The 2012 GLBW conference brought together staff from university research and extension programs, farmer organizations, conservation organizations, and government agencies to learn about programs that advance the use of Continuous Living Cover (CLC) in production agriculture in the U.S. Upper Midwest. This report summarizes the conference discussions and conclusions. The conference agenda is included at the end of this report and background materials distributed at the conference are attached.

Attendance: 61	
Iowa	30
Minnesota	14
Wisconsin	7
Illinois	4
Other states	6

On the first day of the conference, GLBW-affiliated working groups that support CLC in the Midwest hosted concurrent sessions on: perennial forage and pasturelands, perennial biomass, agroforestry, and cover crops. Conference participants learned about progress and plans of the working groups, discussed barriers for moving forward, and identified opportunities for advancing CLC at the local and regional scales. The day ended with a plenary where participants heard from each of the four CLC sessions as well as a report on the status of perennial grains research. The plenary group then discussed overlapping issues and identified opportunities for moving forward with multiple CLC strategies. The working group progress reports and an update on perennial grains research that were provided to conference participants are attached.

In the second day of the conference, participants reviewed programs for promoting CLC in six watershed and landscape sites in the Upper Midwest. Conference attendees chose to participate in one of three concurrent sessions. Each session reviewed the work at two sites, discussing the partnerships and programs in place to promote and implement CLC, and the barriers and opportunities for getting more CLC on the ground. These sessions were followed by a plenary, where the group identified activities and possible synergies for expanding use of CLC at scales that would provide measurable economic and environmental benefits in targeted watershed and landscape sites. Two-page summaries of the work in the watershed sites discussed at the conference are attached.

## Challenges:

Each of the breakout sessions over the two-day conference identified challenges to increasing use of CLC. The challenges most frequently cited were:

- High and rising price of grains
- Low and dropping price of coal and natural gas
- Lack of and/or nascent markets for some CLC; low value of CLC crops
- Lack of investment in new plant material (breeding and seed production)
- Agronomic methods and machinery for CLC crops are inadequately developed, tested and described
- CLC polycultures in particular need and warrant more research and testing
- CLC successes at the field-scale are not adequately demonstrated and described at the scale of farms, watersheds, or landscapes, and along value chains
- Limited knowledge of CLC among crop advisors, agency personnel, and others who design farm assistance programs and advise farmers
- Institutional support for CLC adoption is divided among disconnected organizations assisting and advising farmers, which limits integration of multiple CLC practices and impact at landscape level
- Lack of CLC outreach programs to non-operational farmland owners
- Many environmental costs of agriculture are externalized
- Some government policies and programs are contradictory or not supportive of CLC
- Investments in existing cropping systems impede transitions to alternative crops
- The mostly urban public overwhelmingly influences farm policy through market decisions, voting, and paying for government farm programs. However, most people are largely unaware of how their decisions impact agriculture or how CLC will improve the environmental performance of agricultural.

The participants recognized that not all of these challenges can be overcome in the short- or medium-term, but all can be addressed over the long-term. The challenges are not the same in each location and are different for each form of CLC. For example, high commodity grain prices are a barrier to adoption of most perennial cropping systems, but may present opportunities for increased adoption of cover crops.

Many organizations are currently addressing these challenges. Each prioritizes these challenges differently and acts according to their institutional mission and objectives. The group discussed how some of these challenges might be successfully addressed in the short- to medium-term. For example, the public (urban and rural) can be better informed about the alternatives for agriculture if we use consistent messaging and provide better information about CLC. Some organizations are already making these connections in targeted watersheds, where they are demonstrating how a multi-institutional coordinated program delivering a consistent message greatly increases our overall impact.

## Summary of opportunities for advancing CLC in the U.S. Upper Midwest:

1. Strategic alliances are essential for advancing the complex programs required to increase use of CLC in the region. Alliances among farmer organizations, universities (research and extension in particular), agribusinesses (all along various value chains), conservation organizations, and government agencies are needed at all scales – local, state, and the multi-state region. GLBW collaborators are leading and participating in many local and state-wide alliances and GLBW is a regional alliance that is mission-focused on CLC. There are opportunities to expand the existing alliances; to learn from and replicate successful watershed and landscape partnership models; and to broaden the regional GLBW coalition geographically and institutionally. GLBW has an opportunity to facilitate alliance-building by showcasing successful examples of alliances within the region and from elsewhere; and convening potential partners.
2. Communication
  - a. Formalize the material describing the strategic reasons for CLC and long-term vision for GLBW.
  - b. Document a selected vocabulary and language about CLC and promote consistent use of the vocabulary by GLBW partners, working group associates, and others. Build the brand for our work. Examples: focus on “sustainable management of working lands” as distinguished from programs that take land out of production; use the “continuous living cover” phrase and “CLC” abbreviation in all appropriate communications; and promote perennials and cover crops because they are good for farming (e.g., improve soil health, reduce input costs), often doing so ahead of promoting their off-farm environmental benefits.
  - c. Target audiences through appropriate media and formats and by trusted messengers, at all scales from national leaders to urban dwellers and farmer communities:
    - i. Use peer to peer communication. Farmer to farmer is particularly effective. For example, we can use stories from farmers identified by our partners to spread the GLBW message in farm media (print, radio, TV, posters, field days, etc.). This is consistent with the “champions” concept developed by the cover crops group. As another example, a similar approach can work with Certified Crop Advisors (CCAs) and similar experts talking to their peers in profession media and meetings, Web pages, etc. Midwest Cover Crop Council and the Agroforestry Working Group are already doing this.
    - ii. Design a program to specifically reach non-operational farmland owners.
    - iii. Design a program to reach urban populations.

- d. Describe examples of CLC programs that function at operational scales; work with partners to create a series of stories telling of operational successes at the scale of farms and watersheds, and along CLC value chains.
3. Develop markets for CLC. Carry out more economic research, particularly at the farm and landscape scales and along entire value chains. Every working group and every watershed site identified the need for CLC market development and more economic data and analysis. Documenting the farm-based benefits of CLC and the value of environmental services were particular noted as opportunities.
4. Develop and support training programs for the following audiences in collaboration with the CLC working groups:
  - a. CCAs
  - b. Champions (farms who effectively communicate with their peers about their successes with CLC)
  - c. Agency staff
5. Expand our use of maps and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for targeting CLC to areas on the landscape where they will have the greatest combined positive environmental and economic impacts.
6. Inform policy-makers about the economic and environmental opportunities with CLC; land coming out of CRP provides an immediate opportunity to create positive changes to policies and programs, with minimal costs and significant benefits.
7. Monitor regional progress and report region results.
  - a. Research the work of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) toward tracking CLC, and use this to promote new questions for next census.
  - b. Aggregate results of the GLBW partnership and working groups and prepare multi-institutional, regional progress reports.

The conference ended with about 30 participants staying to discuss the roles of the GLBW Central Office in supporting and implementing the programs and activities identified during the conference. Roles of the GLBW Central Office are being considered as we prepare our 2013 plan.

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**Conference Goal: Conference attendees will gain a better understanding of the opportunities for promoting and establishing continuous living cover, including practical, short-term actions that will lead to more continuous living cover on farmlands in the region.**

**AGENDA**

**Monday, 15 October**

**10:30 – Registration (Pioneer room)**

**11:30 – 2:30 Sessions on continuous living cover; session leaders**

**Perennial forage & pasture: Laura Paine, Wisconsin DATCP  
(Room 3534) Terry VanDerPol, Land Stewardship Project**

**Perennial biomass: Emily Heaton, Iowa State University  
(Oak room) Carol Williams, University of Wisconsin**

**Agroforestry: Michele Schoeneberger, USDA - National Agroforestry  
(Room 3538) Center  
Diomy Zamora, University of Minnesota**

**Cover crops: Tom Kaspar, USDA-ARS  
(Pioneer room) Dale Mutch, Michigan State University**

**2:30 – 3:00 break / networking (Pioneer Room)**

**3:00 – 4:15 Presentations on continuous living cover (Pioneer; facilitator: George Boody)**

**4:15 – 5:00 Continuous living cover: opportunities and actions (Pioneer Room; moderator:  
Rick Cruse)**

**5:00 – 6:30 Reception (Campanile Room)**

**Dinner on your own**

Tuesday, 16 October

7:30 Light breakfast / networking (Gallery Room)

8:00 – 8:10 Watershed sites assignment for the breakout sessions (Gallery Room)

8:10 – 10:00 Watershed sites breakout sessions; session leaders

Boone – Upper Sangamon Session: Eileen Bader, The Nature Conservancy  
(Gallery Room) Steve John, Agricultural Watershed Institute

Upper Cedar – Blue Earth Session: Mary Beth Stevenson, Iowa DNR  
(Room 3534) Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage

Chippewa – SW Wisconsin Session: Kylene Olson, Chippewa River Watershed Project  
(Room 3538) Angie Wright, Southwest Badger RC&D

10:00 – 10:30 break / networking (Gallery Room)

10:30 – 11:15 Presentations on watershed sites (Gallery Room; facilitator: Gene Turner)

11:15 – 12:15 Continuous living cover in watershed sites: opportunities and actions (Gallery Room; moderator: Rick Cruse)

12:15 – 1:00 Lunch (Gallery Room)

1:15 – 3:30 GLBW Partners' Meeting: Annual report from the GLBW Director, setting priorities for 2013 (Gallery Room: all participants are welcome)

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