

Green covers

Goal	Promote the use of plant covers to minimize soil erosion and nutrient leaching.
Short description of the measure	In this fact sheet, green covers are meant to be all sort of solutions that allow agricultural soils to remain covered by living plants during critical periods for avoiding soil erosion and nutrient leaching. This critical period is usually autumn and winter. Depending on the agroclimatic conditions and crop systems, this can be done by using intermediate crops (a sown crop that is compatible with the crop calendar), green manures (sown plants for improving nutrient content on the soil and retaining them), cover crops (wild or sown crops that do not have necessarily a commercial interest), etc. The technical characteristics and terminology used for these agronomic techniques is diverse, but this measure tries to include all of them. Inert soil covers (such as mulching, stubbles, etc.) are not considered in this measure, as they are already included in another fact sheet.
Timeframe (When to start a measure and anticipated time for implementation)	When to start: anytime during the crop cycle in arable crops, or in autumn for permanent crops.
How auditors can assess if the measure has been implemented in a good quality?	Depending on agroclimatic conditions, cover crops should be as diverse as possible (different types of plant covers delivering different benefits) and the soil should be left bare the minimum amount of time. Cover crops should be used as widely as possible.
Additional information the auditor need for verification (if any)	Cover crops implementation can be verified using Farm Register Books but more likely by visiting the farm in different periods of the year.
Effects on biodiversity (ecosystems, species, soil biodiversity)	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The erosion risk is minimized ▪ When green covers are mown or tilled, they contribute to enrich soil organic matter contents and carbon sequestration ▪ They help to break weed cycles, thus reducing the need of using herbicides. The same happens with pest and diseases ▪ Nitrogen can be restituted by using cover crops
Indicator/key data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of days/year with agricultural soil uncovered.

Reference

- www.soilwealth.com.au/resources/fact-sheets/soil-nutrition-and-compost/managing-cover-crop-residues-in-vegetable-production/
- www.soilwealth.com.au/resources/fact-sheets/winter-cover-crops/
- www.soilwealth.com.au/resources/fact-sheets/soil-nutrition-and-compost/summer-cover-crops/

Further information: [Knowledge Pool](#)

This Action Fact Sheet belongs to the training package for auditors of standard organisations and companies and was developed within the project LIFE Food & Biodiversity (Biodiversity in Standards and Labels of for the Food Industry). The main objective of the project is to improve the biodiversity performance of standards and sourcing requirements in the food industry by helping standard organisations to integrate efficient biodiversity criteria into their schemes and motivating food processing companies and retailers to include comprehensive biodiversity criteria into their sourcing guidelines.

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