

# The Western Cover Crops Council: Engaging Collaborators in the Southwest Region

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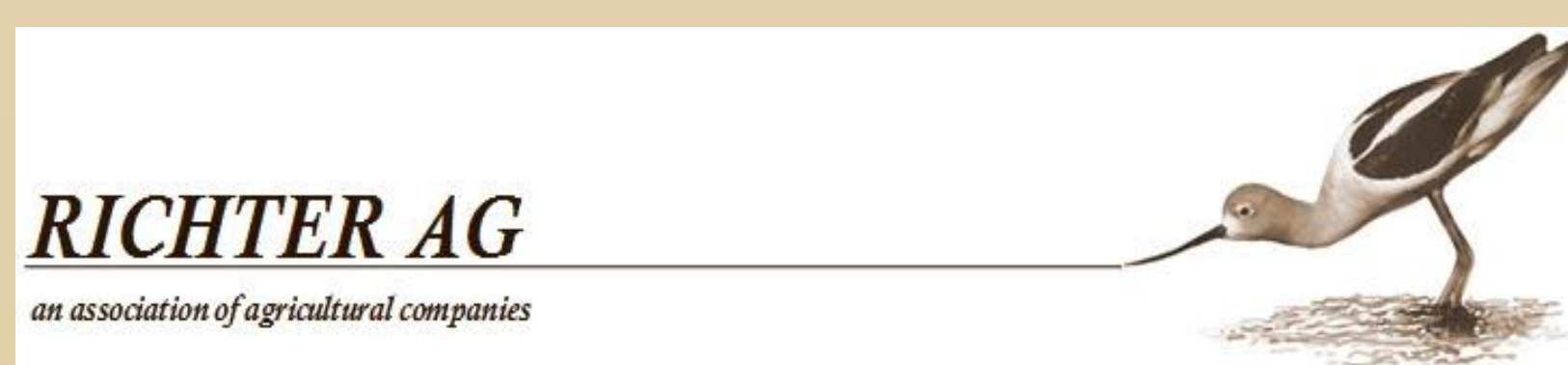
The WCCC Board Retreat in Kona, Hawaii

## About The Western Cover Crops Council (WCCC):

- The WCCC is a networking organization whose mission is to facilitate and enhance communication and collaboration that promotes the successful adoption of cover cropping into Western U.S. agricultural systems.
- WCCC comprises of a board of directors and 4 regional committees. California is the Southwestern Region serving CA, AZ, and NV.

## What are cover crops?

- Cover crops are planted to cover and enrich soil rather than for harvest. They are planted in soil that is otherwise bare. Typically, in annual crop production, cover crops grow in the winter months, between summer crops.
- Cover crops can build soil health, soil carbon, and play a role in increasing the climate resilience of California farms.



## Building the Southwest Regional Committee:

- Relying on networks and relationships:
  - Cold calls and emails were made to extension personnel in AZ and NV.
  - Recruitment of farmers and industry partners were prioritized.
  - Networking takes time, but a personal phone call can go a long way.
- Early engagement leads to future buy-in:
  - Have a process that allows for input from the group from the beginning.
  - Working together on a project can increase group engagement



Cover crop roots  
Photo by: Amelie Gaudin

## WCCC Projects:

### Sacramento Valley Tour March 2022

- A full day of programming with four stops
- Topics included:
  - Benefits and challenges of cover crops in annual and perennial systems
  - Water management and species selection
  - Termination demonstrations with machinery and livestock
- 50 attendees.
- Funding was provided by Western SARE.
- Two tour sites were CDFA Healthy Soils Program Demonstration project sites.
- Tour organization was led by Sarah Light with strong support and engagement from the Southwest Regional Committee and UCANR Program Support Unit.
- In person committee retreat was held the day before the tour at UCANR building in Davis, CA.



Two cover crop termination methods, grazing and mechanical.  
Photos by: Amelie Gaudin and Debankur Sanyal

### Cover Crop Selection Tool:

- In the process of creating an online, interactive cover crop selection tool for the Western Region.
- This tool will incorporate the expertise of local farmers, extension researchers, USDA Plant Materials Center, USDA researchers, seed companies, nonprofits, and other individuals that utilize cover crops.
- Tool will be first of its kind as data will be verified specifically for the Western Region.
- To ensure accuracy, data verification is being conducted at three levels (all West, state by state, and by US EPA ecoregion).
- Funding is provided by the USDA, secured by the WCCC, and is being led and administered by UCANR.
- Tool is planned to be released in 2025.

## Future Directions:

- WCCC is developing resources for cover crop seed production and hosting outreach events throughout the Western region.
- Want to join the WCCC? Scan here:



## Lessons Learned:

- Communication should be tailored to engage collaborators, especially non-academics.
- Keep people engaged by brainstorming early on, setting clear expectations, and maintaining clear communication.
- Ask for help—the team wants a successful project.
- The paperwork takes more time than you think, especially when working with other institutions.
- Collaborative projects are a great way to build capacity at the local, state, and regional level.
- If we work together, we can get more done.
- Share visibility and expect success.



Photos from the SW WCCC Sacramento Valley Tour  
Photos by: Margaret Smither-Kopperl