Scout for Weeds

One advantage of planting cover crops early is winter-weed suppression. Still, it is a good idea to scout for winter weeds that may emerge during these months. Scout for chickweed and henbit, two common winter weeds found throughout the United States. For best results, it is important to control them while they are small. Herbicide choices for winter weeds are selective. Positive weed identification is important to making the best herbicide choice.

DECEMBER THROUGH FEBRUARY

The winter months before cash crop planting are not nearly as busy as the fall, but there are tasks to accomplish such as planning, scouting, maintaining equipment and purchasing supplies. It can also be a time to diversify the farm with livestock grazing.

Plan Crop Rotation

A good crop rotation spreads risk, breaks pest cycles and improves yields. Although cropping decisions are strongly driven by the market, planning ahead for a crop rotation can help maximize profits over the rotation cycle. Now is a good time to decide the cash crops and cover crops to be grown on each field and to look ahead to the next cover crop. For example, follow cereal cover crops with soybeans or other legumes. Grow clover or other legumes before cereal cash crops or corn.

Figure 4.1 shows a crop rotation planner for a two-year rotation of field corn > rye cover crop > cotton > crimson clover cover crop. This rotational sequence can be repeated for a four-year rotation. The horizontal rows of 52 boxes in Figure 4.1 represent one year and each box represents one week. Colored cells represent the time each crop is in the field from planting to harvest, or termination in the case of cover crops. Table 4.1 includes the days-to-maturity (DTM) data used to determine the number of weeks the crops will be in the field. Note the recommended three weeks between termination of the rye cover crop and planting cotton in year two.

Construct your own crop rotation planner using Figure 4.1 as a guide. This can be done with a spreadsheet, or you can make a template on paper and copy as needed. Compare alternative rotation scenarios using the days to maturity (DTM) data in Table 4.1 or local knowledge as a guide for planting and harvest or termination timelines. If winter grazing is being considered, block out sufficient weeks based on local practices or block out 15 weeks on the planner. You can use the crop rotation planner to define a rotation for the next

**TABLE 4.1. Time to maturity for select crops grown in the Southeastern United States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Time to Maturity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buckwheat</td>
<td>~12 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>~21 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field corn</td>
<td>~20 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field peas</td>
<td>~8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts</td>
<td>~19 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soybeans</td>
<td>~20 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet corn</td>
<td>~10 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet potatoes</td>
<td>~17 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>~10 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watermelons</td>
<td>~11 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter wheat</td>
<td>~32 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>