Despite the advantages of planting cover crops to reduce nitrate leaching to local waters and the Chesapeake Bay, adoption is still low in Maryland. Estimates are that even with subsidies, less than half of the state’s corn and soybean farms are cover cropped. One reason could be that most cover crops used in the subsidy program are planted after fall harvest and terminated before spring planting, which does not give them much time to grow roots that can capture excess nitrogen in the soil and provide farmers an economic benefit.

So, using a SARE grant, University of Maryland researcher Raymond Weil examined strategies for planting cover crops earlier in the season and the effect it had on both nutrient requirements and yields of corn and soybeans. Working with other researchers and farmers in both Maryland and Pennsylvania, he focused on cover crop species not typically used under the subsidy program, including radishes, legumes and mixes.

The team found that early, deep-rooted cover crops did reduce the risk of nitrate leaching into groundwater and improved corn yields by providing nitrogen in the spring. They have shared project results with more than 2,000 farmers and educators, and the use of a radish cover crop in the state program has increased in recent years.

For more information on this project, see www.sare.org/projects, and search for project number LNE14-338.
SARE Grants in Maryland

SARE has awarded a total of 131 grants in Maryland since 1988.

SARE's Impact

53 percent of producers report using a new production technique after reading a SARE publication.

79 percent of producers said they improved soil quality through their SARE project.

64 percent of producers said their SARE project helped them achieve higher sales.

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For detailed information on SARE projects, go to www.SARE.org

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