
CROP INSURANCE MYTH VS FACT: MULTIPLE RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

MYTH: Crop insurance discourages farmers from using other risk management tools such as market hedging, cover crops and off-farm income. The use of these other risk management tools without crop insurance would be enough risk management for farmers.

FACT: Farming is risky, so farmers use a multitude of risk management strategies to manage the enormous hazards they face every year when they plant a crop. However, crop insurance is the only risk management tool that farmers can literally take to the bank to prove their ability to pay back annual operating loans required to keep the farm going.

Because each farm is unique, each farm's types of risk management strategies can vary, but crop insurance is a critical tool in a farmer's toolbox. Here are a few examples of the other risk management tools utilized by farmers:

- The use of **market hedging** has increased significantly since 2000, and approximately one quarter of all corn, soybeans, and wheat are hedged.* Additionally, farmers of other commodities often utilize **production or marketing contracts** to lock in prices for their goods. In 2020, USDA estimates that about 33% of the value of all agricultural production is grown under contract, with this risk management tool being most utilized in livestock, poultry and eggs, dairy, sugar beets, peanuts, fruit, and processing tomatoes.
- Most farms in the United States already rely heavily on **off-farm income** to maintain their operations and carry the enormous risk that comes with farming. According to USDA, recent increases in total farm income “largely reflect greater income from off-farm sources, where the majority of farm households earn most, if not all, of their income.”
- **Cover crops** were planted on nearly 18 million acres of US farmland in 2022†, a nearly 33 percent increase from 2017. The 2018 Farm Bill also clarified the ability to plant cover crops on acres that are insured through the Federal crop insurance program. Planting cover crops can help manage risk in a variety of ways, including the improvement of soil health and an increased ability of soil to hold moisture in dry regions. Cover crops are gaining popularity among producers as information on benefits spread and carbon sequestration contracts become more prevalent.
- **Conservation tillage** practices are utilized on approximately 81 percent of soybean (2023), 76 percent of corn (2021), 69 percent of wheat (2022), and 43 percent of cotton acres (2019) in the United States. These practices help manage risk by reducing topsoil erosion and improving soil health.‡

* Economic Research Service, USDA

† USDA Economic Research Service, “2022 Census of Agriculture: Cover Crop Use Continues to Be Most Common in Eastern United States,” April 16, 2024.

‡ USDA, Economic Research Service, 2025

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- Clearly, the existence of crop insurance is not keeping farmers from utilizing other risk management strategies. However, cover crops and conservation tillage are not going to be enough for lenders who are looking to pencil out operating loans.