**Abstract (269 words)**

Incorporation of over-wintering cover crops (CCs) into Midwestern maize-soybean systems offers numerous environmental advantages including decreased nitrate leaching and reduced soil erosion. However, the contribution of CCs to weed control is poorly understood, with wide ranges in study results. Insight into the experimental, environmental, and managerial factors that influence weed responses to CCs in these systems is needed, as CC-derived weed suppression could offer short-term benefits to producers by reducing input costs associated with weed control. We conducted a meta-analysis on studies performed in maize-soybean rotations in the Midwestern grain-producing region of the United States that measured either weed biomass or density in both a CC and no-cover treatment. We found 15 studies that met our criteria, resulting in 123 paired comparisons of weed biomass and 119 of weed density. Even after accounting for CC biomass production, grass CCs reduced weeds more compared to non-grasses. Higher CC biomass was associated with more weed control, but a 75% reduction in weed biomass required 5 Mg ha-1 and 11 Mg ha-1 of grass and non-grass CC residue, respectively. Weed suppression from CCs was strongest for winter annual weeds, intermediate for summer annuals, and had no effect on perennial weeds. No other management factors (termination method, planting method, tillage system, CC termination to cash crop planting gap) were important in determining weed suppression. We found there was no significant trade-off in managing CCs for both weed suppression and cash crop yield, but grasses are better at suppressing weeds but don’t provide yield bumps. While these analyses suggest it is possible to manage CCs for significant weed control, process-based models predict it may be challenging to achieve CC biomasses needed to replace other weed control tactics under the current climate and management constraints of a traditional Midwestern maize-soybean system.

**Introduction**

Integrated weed management approaches are becoming more critical as the prevalence of weeds with resistance to multiple modes of herbicide action increases (Price et al. 2011, CITE). Cover crops (CCs) are a potential component of integrated approaches to weed management (CITE many little hammers?). Additionally, CCs offer myriad long-term environmental benefits in many agricultural production systems (Kaspar and Singer 2011, Blanco-Canqui et al. 2015). In mid-western United States (US) maize-based systems CCs have been found to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, and increase water infiltration (CITE). While long-term benefits have been quantified, there is less research that helps producers identify short-term agronomic benefits of CCs that might help them offset production costs. A recent study using partial budgets showed annual net returns to CCs are negative for the majority of Midwestern producers (Plastina et al. 2018). Managing CCs such that they replace weed control costs may create net positive balances under certain circumstances (Mischler et al. 2010).

Recent meta-analyses have shown cash crop diversification (Weisberger et al. 2019) and use of CCs (Ospitan et al. 2018) can offer weed control in a range of grain production systems. However, maize-soybean systems in the mid-western US make up a large percentage of US land-use and have disproportionate impacts on water quality in the Mississippi drainage basin (Jones et al. 2018; NASS 2017). This ubiquitous production system merits specific consideration with regard to weed suppression offered by CCs, as context-specific analyses can offer insights not accessible when global scopes are investigated. For example, a state-specific synthesis paper found grasses and broadleaf CCs were equally and significantly weed-suppressive in their production systems (Baraibar et al. 2019), in contrast to results from a world-wide meta-analysis that found grass CCs were not effective at reducing either weed biomass or density (Ospitan et al. 2018). The state-specific analysis was also able to offer target cover crop biomasses that offer significant weed control. Estimates from the north-eastern US show managing CCs such that they provide weed control equivalent to herbicide control requires CC biomasses in excess of 5 Mg ha-1 (Mischler et al. 2010, Mirsky et al. 2013). Quantitatively-driven recommendations such as those are currently unavailable for the Corn Belt. More-over, previous reviews of literature and multi-year trials have produced wide ranges in CC production estimates for the mid-western US (e.g. Snapp et al. 2005, Silva 2014, Kaspar and Bakker 2015). Using process-based models such as the Agricultural Production Systems sIMulator (APSIM; Keating et al. 2003) or the System Approach to Land Use Sustainability (SALUS; Rafa what to cite) to explore the biomass production potential of winter CCs across the US would provide useful baselines to evaluate the feasibility of extracting CC services that depend on biomass production such as weed control.

Cover crops alter the weed environment through several mechanisms, including competing for resources as live plants (e.g. sunlight, nutrients), altering the soil environment in ways that affect weed seed germination (e.g allelopathy, soil moisture retention), and altering the environment in which weed seedlings develop (e.g. reducing temperatures, creating light stress). Each of these may have a suppressive or stimulatory effect on weeds depending on context, and region-specific trends have not yet been identified. Additionally, the production system in which CCs are deployed can impact the observed weed response. For example, many producers use CCs as part of larger conservation plans that include zero-tillage. Cash crop diversification offers higher weed suppression in no-till systems (Weisberger et al. 2019), but to our knowledge the effect of system tillage on CC weed suppression has not been examined for the Corn Belt. Furthermore, large questions remain about how CC interactions with the cash crop can affect weed suppression in maize-soybean systems (e.g. termination-to-planting gaps, crop residue). Finally, CC weed research employs varying methodologies, and it is unclear how these can affect results and interpretation.

To begin to address these research gaps we conducted a meta-analysis to understand the impact of (i) experimental design, (ii) environmental growing conditions, and (iii) managerial choices on CC weed control in maize-soybean systems in the US Midwestern Corn Belt. Additionally, we sought to identify Corn Belt-specific CC biomass targets for providing significant weed control and, using a process-based model (SALUS), evaluate the feasibility of achieving these statistically-determined targets.

**Methods**

Database search

We conducted a systematic search of relevant literature using ISI Web of Knowledge (WoS,

available online). A literature was conducted in October 2018 using the following Boolean string: (weed\* AND ("cover crop\*" OR "green manure" OR "catch crop\*") AND ("corn" OR "maize" OR "soybean\*")). This resulted in a total of 676 studies that were screened for eligibility based on the following three criteria:

(i) Studies must have been conducted in a US ‘Corn Belt’ state, defined as a state in the contiguous Midwestern region with the largest acreages of maize acres harvested in the most recent five years of available data (USDA-NASS 2019) including: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin (Fig. 1)

(ii) Studies must have measured weed biomass and/or weed density

(iii) Studies must have included a treatment that tested the effects of a fall-planted CC followed by either maize or soybean against a treatment that included no CC holding all other factors constant.

From this search, we screened the full text of 220 articles for inclusion in the database. From this, only 15 articles met our three criteria. *Can someone make a PRISMA diagram?*

Database development

We included weed biomass, weed density, and cash crop yield as our response variables in our database. Values were recorded in a paired format, requiring the response variable to be measured in the same crop at the same time with all aspects of management held constant save for a treatment of a fall-planted CC. Data were recorded for each site-year separately or averaged, depending on how they were reported. No zero values were reported. Management information was extracted systematically from each experiment. Extracted data included information pertaining to geographical location and soil characteristics of the study; cash and CC management such as tillage system, CC termination method, planting and termination dates, and species; and experimental information such as timing of weed measurements and type of weed (Table 1). Aridity index, an integrated measure of temperature, precipitation and potential evapotranspiration, was derived from location coordinates using the CGIAR-CSI Global-Aridity and Global-PET databases (Zomer et al. 2008).

Statistical analysis

All data manipulation and statistical modelling was done in R version 3.6.1 (CITE) using the tidyverse meta-package (CITE) and other data manipulation packages (cite janitor, readxl, googlesheets, lubridate, others?). Specific statistical packages are cited below.

The response ratio was defined as the value of the response in the CC treatment divided by the value in the no-cover treatment (Gurevitch et al. 2018). The natural log of the response ratio was taken to address heteroscedasticity; the log-response-ratio (LRR) was then used for all statistical analyses. Values were back-transformed and presented as a percent change for interpretation purposes. When log-transformed means are back-transformed they become median values (CITE?); back-transformed values are therefore reported as medians. To estimate over-all effect sizes, we fit a linear mixed-model using the lmer4 package (CITE) in R (CITE) using the LRR as the response variable and accounting for the random effect of study with non-parametric weighting based on sample sizes (CITE). We used this weighting method because only three of the 15 studies reported variances on weed measurements. Results were analyzed using the lmerTest (CITE) and emmeans (CITE) packages.

CC biomass is known to have a strong effect on weed suppression (CITE). In order to assess individual modifiers’ effect on weed responses, we first assessed whether the CC biomass produced at each modifier level was significantly different by fitting a mixed effects model with CC biomass as the response, an individual modifier as a fixed effect, and a random effect of study. In our dataset, CC type (grass and non-grass) significantly affected CC biomass production (p=0.01). When testing for the effect of CC type on weed suppression, we therefore chose to include CC biomass as a covariate to control for these differences. We did so by including CC type (grass and non-grass), CC biomass at termination, and their interaction as fixed effects and study as a random effect and weighting as described above. The interaction was not significant based on nested model comparison, so the interaction was not included in the final model. For all other modifiers, they were assessed individually using a linear mixed model as described above, but with only one fixed effect modifier included at a time.

Significance was assigned at a p-value less than 0.05, but intermediate p-values <0.10 were investigated (Ho et al. 2019). The robustness of our results was assessed by removing one study at a time from the dataset and fitting the statistical model for each dataset individually (Philibert et al. 2012). *The radish one is super bad at controlling weeds. But it doesn’t change significance, just drastically changes the non-significnace of weed density. Shrug.* Additionally, select individual points were assessed for disproportionately influencing results in the same manner. For significant results, robustness against possibly un-published non-significant results was assessed using a fail-safe number (Rosenthral 1979).

To assess the amount of CC biomass required to achieve a 50% reduction in weed biomass, we fit a mixed effects model with CC biomass at termination as a fixed effect and study as a random effect. The unconditioned fitted parameters were used to back-calculate the amount of biomass needed to achieve an LRR of -0.69, which corresponds to a 50% reduction in weed biomass in the CC treatment. The uncertainty around this value was estimated using the delta method (Hoeff 2012).

Finally, each point was categorized as a ‘win-win’ or a ‘neutral’ category based on cash-crop yield and weed pressure responses; if the comparison exhibited both an increase in cash-crop yield and a decrease in weed pressure it was assigned ‘win-win’, otherwise it was assigned a value of ‘neutral’. To explore possible predictors for win-win scenarios, we fit random forest models (CITE) using several R packages (CITE).

Modelling Scenarios

To investigate the feasibility of producers managing CCs for weed control in the mid-western US, we used the SALUS model to simulate winter rye (*Secale cereal*) biomass using 30 years of historical weather data. There is little information available about the most prevalent cover crop used in the Corn Belt, but a 2008 survey indicated rye was the most common across four of the states included in our target area (Singer 2008). Additionally, rye represents the most optimistic cover crop choice for maximizing biomass production in this region (Kaspar and Bakker 2015, OTHERS?). Simulations were done on a field scale averaged at the county level within the 10 states included in our study area. Planting dates included were September X (un-realistic), October X (optimistic), and November X (realistic). The date when the CC reached a threshold value was recorded blah blah.

**3. Results and Discussion**

**3.1 Database overview**

Fifteen articles (**Supplementary material X**) fit our criteria, producing 123 response ratios for weed biomass and 119 response ratios for weed density. The studies represent a range of site characteristics and managements representative of maize-soybean production systems of the Corn Belt (Fig 1; Table 1). Although the following crop’s planting density can affect a CC’s weed suppression effectiveness (Ryan et al. 2011), we were unable to assess that aspect of the cropping systems due to a paucity of reported cash crop planting densities in the papers.

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| **Figure 1** (rough draft). Our database comprised fifteen published studies done in one of the 12 Corn Belt states that measured weed biomass or weed density in a winter cover cropped and no-cover treatment of maize or soybean; point shape indicates the weed response reported, point size the number of comparisons extracted from the study location, and point color the tillage classification of the study. No studies from North and South Dakota met our selection criteria. |

**Table 1.** Management, experimental design, and site characteristics were extracted from each publication; weed biomass and weed density responses were separated into two separate datasets. The full database is available at XX.

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| **Category** | **Factor** | **Biomass (n = 123)** | **Density (n = 119)** |
| ***Management*** | | | |
| System | Tillage | Tilled (n=30)  Zero-till (n=93) | Tilled (n=31)  Zero-till (n=88) |
|  | Time between cover crop termination and cash crop planting | -31 – 29 days | -31 – 13 days |
| Cover Crop | Type | Grass (n=46)  Non-grass (n=77) | Grass (n=31)  Non-grass (n=88) |
|  | Planting date | Aug 15 – Oct 18 | Aug 15 – Oct 31 |
|  | Planting density | 13.4 – 180 kg seed ha-1 | 9 – 135 kg seed ha-1 |
|  | Termination date | April 18 – June 18 | April 18 – June 18 |
|  | Termination method | Several methods (n = 3)  herbicides (n = 54)  mechanical (roller crimper, mowing; n = 29)  winterkill (n = 37) | Several methods (n = 3)  herbicides (n = 53)  mechanical (roller crimper, mowing; n = 22)  winterkill (n = 37)  none (n = 4) |
|  | Cover crop biomass at termination | 130 – 9003 kg ha-1 | 0 – 9003 kg ha-1 |
| Cash crop | Subsequent crop | Maize (n=78)  Soybean (n=45) | Maize (n=73)  Soybean (n=42)  Data taken from both maize and soybean subsequent crops and averaged (n=4) |
|  | Cash crop planting date | April 20 – June 30 | April 27 – June 18 |
|  | Corn yield | 40-13500 kg ha-1 (yup, 40 is a real number coming from Hoffman, study 9) | 40-11200 kg ha-1 (yup, 40 is a real number coming from Hoffman, study 9) |
|  | Soybean yield | 300-3618 | 300-3310 kg ha-1 |
| ***Site*** | | | |
|  | State | Illinois (17)  Kansas (9)  Michigan (44)  Minnesota (12)  Nebraska (11)  Ohio (25)  Wisconsin (5) | Iowa (4)  Illinois (5)  Indiana (4)  Michigan (45)  Minnesota (16)  Missouri (18)  Nebraska (6)  Ohio (21) |
|  | Latitude | 38.0 - 45.7 | 38.7 - 45.7 |
|  | Longitude | 81.9 – 101W | 83.0 – 101W |
|  | Soil type | Loam (n = 46)  Sandy loam (n = 1)  Silt Loam (n = 67)  Silty Clay Loam (n = 9) | Loam (n = 59)  Silt Loam (n = 61)  Silty Clay Loam (n = 9) |
|  | Organic matter content | 1.5 - 4.15% | 1 – 3.4% |
|  | Aridity index\* | 0.37 – 0.94 | 0.44 – 0.96 |
|  | Publication year | 1993 - 2018 | 1993 - 2018 |
| **Experiment** | | | |
| Design | Number of replicates | 3 - 5 | 3 – 6 |
|  | Type of weed(s) measured | Summer annual (86)  Winter annual (17)  Perennial (15)  Unknown (5) | Summer annual (75)  Winter annual (29)  Perennial (15) |
|  | Duration of experiment | <5 years (n=X)  >5 years (n=X) | <5 years (n=X)  >5 years (n=X) |
| Timing | Timing of weed measurement with respect to cash crop planting | Before (38)  After (119) | Before (38)  After (119) |
|  | Season of weed measurement\*\* | Spring (January-June; n = 19)  Summer (June-September; n = 104)  Fall (September – December; n = 4) | Spring (n = 36)  Summer (n = 79) |
| \*an integrated measure of temperature, precipitation and potential evapotranspiration were derived from location coordinates using the CGIAR-CSI Global-Aridity and Global-PET databases (Zomer et al. 2008).  \*\* Spring: January-June; Summer: June-September; Fall : September – December | | | |

One comparison resulted in an extremely low LRR due to a CC treatment weed biomass of 1 g m-2 (SE = 1 g m-2), corresponding to a 99.9% reduction in weed biomass (Forcella 2013). This comparison was found to disproportionately influence results of the statistical models, and was therefore adjusted to equal the next highest reduction (97%) in weed biomass observed in the database.

**3.2 Overall results**

Overall, CCs significantly reduced weed biomass by a median of 51% (p=0.02), but the reduction in weed density was non-significant (p=0.98; supplementary material). The significant reduction in weed biomass was robust against publication bias; >3000 non-significant studies would need to remain un-published to nullify the result (Rosenthral 1979).

In the weed biomass database, the CC type significantly affected the amount of CC biomass produced (p = 0.01), with grass CCs producing a least-squared means estimated 3.95 Mg ha-1 of biomass, compared to non-grass which produced 2.56 Mg ha-1. Therefore, CC biomass was used as a covariate in the statistical model testing for differences in CC type with regard to suppression of weed biomass. No other modifier significantly affected the amount of CC biomass. The following categorical modifiers had levels with significantly different effects on weed biomass: measurement season (spring, summer), measurement in reference to cash crop planting (before, after), CC type (after controlling for CC biomass production; grass, non-grass), and weed growth habit (winter annual, summer annual, perennial). Weed biomass and density responded with the same patterns to these modifiers, but weed density responses were not significantly different for any factor levels (Fig. 2).

This might also be a good opportunity to discuss why we might have seen differences between weed density and weed biomass

*3.2.1 Response of weed biomass to cover crops*

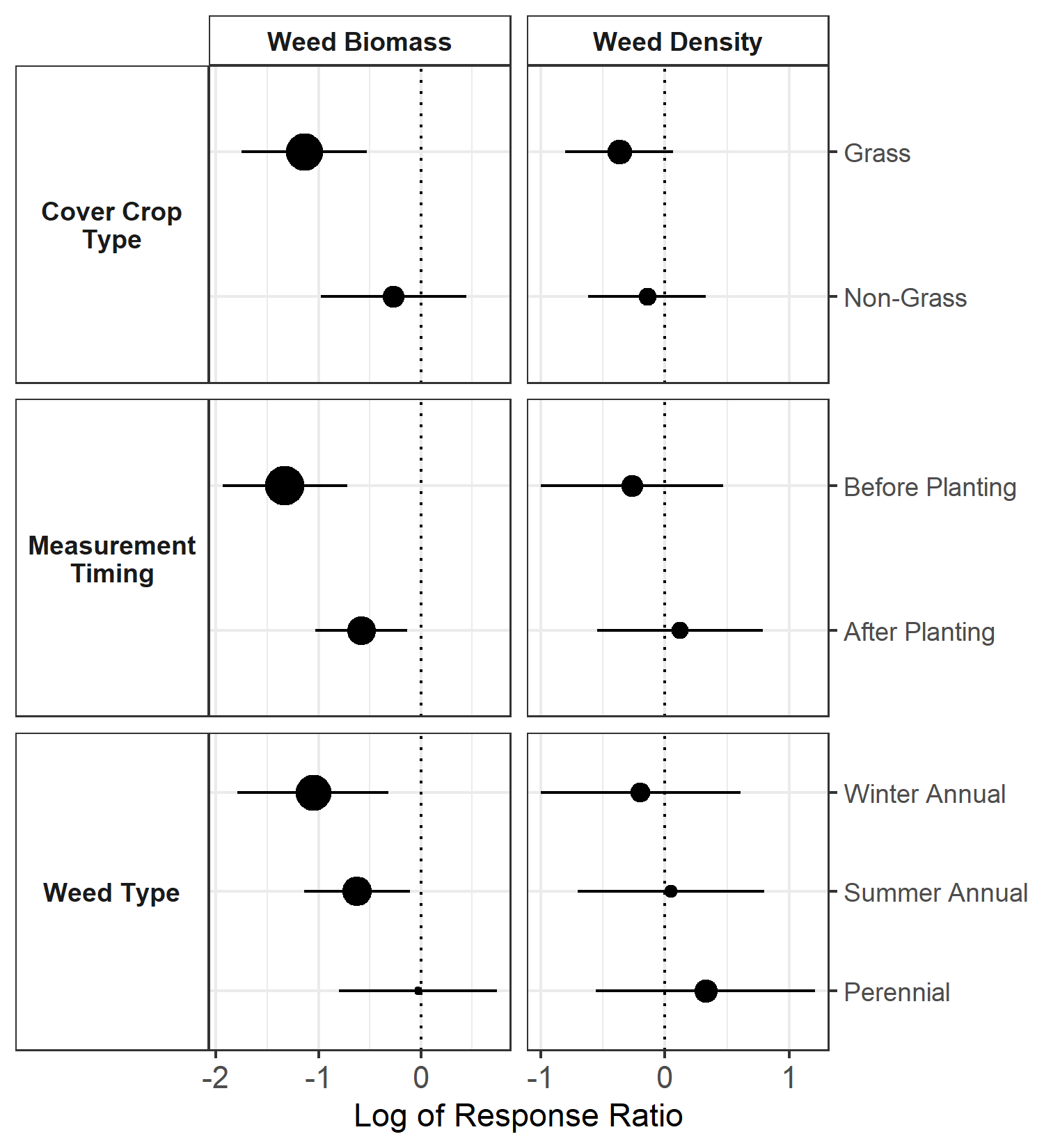
For weed biomass, grass CCs reduced weed biomass by 68% compared to only 33% for non-grass (p<0.01). Measurements taken before cash crop planting showed a 74% reduction in weed biomass, compared to only 44% in measurements taken after planting (p<0.01). Winter annuals showed the strongest reductions (65%), followed by summer annuals (47%), with perennial weeds being unaffected by CCs.

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| **Figure 2** Categorical variables with levels having significantly different included cover crop type\* (grass, non-grass), when the weed measurement occurred (before cash crop planting, after), and the type of weed (winter or summer annual, perennial); values less than 1 indicate cover crops suppressed weeds, size of points indicate strength of the effect, bars represent 95% confidence intervals.  \*After controlling for the amount of cover crop biomass production |

For continuous variables, the only significant relationship was between CC biomass and weed suppression for both weed biomass (after controlling for CC type, p<0.03; **Fig. 3**) and weed density (p<0.01).

**3.3 Cover crop management approaches**

*3.3.1 Cover crop type*

Even after controlling for the effect of CC biomass, grass CCs offered more weed suppression compared to non-grass (Fig. 2). This may have consequences for balancing yield maintenance and weed suppression goals, which are discussed in Section 3.3.X). With regards to weeds, weed suppression by CCs is a combination of physical and chemical suppression, and grasses such as rye may be more effective than legumes on both fronts (Creamer et al. 1996, CITE). The carbon-to-nitrogen ratio of grass CCs can be twice as high as legumes, with grass ratios increasing with higher overall biomass production (Quemada and Cabrera 1995, Ruffo and Bollero 2003, Martinez-Feria et al. 2016). The higher carbon-to-nitrogen ratios of grass residue increase the residence time of the CC residue compared to legume residue, thus potentially suppressing weeds longer after CC termination (Teasdale and Mohler 1993, Ruffo and Bollero 2003). Additionally, the structural arrangement of live grass plants could provide a larger amount of light interception per unit of live biomass compared to legumes (Storkey et al. 2015; CITE). Rye residue also exhibits an allopathic effect, which can inhibit weed seed germination and reduce weed biomass (Teasdale et al. 2012, Dhima et al. 2016). While brassica CCs may also suppress weeds via allelopathy (Bjorkman et al. 2015), only 9 of the 77 non-grass points were brassicas, and they did not exhibit significantly different suppressive effects compared to legumes (supplementary material).

*3.3.2 Cover crop biomass*

The largest management factors affecting CC weed suppression was CC type and CC biomass at termination. There was no significant interaction, meaning the relationship between CC biomass and weed biomass was universal for all CC types, with an added 12% reduction in weed biomass for every additional 1 Mg ha-1 of CC biomass produced. We found 5 Mg ha-1 of biomass is predicted to reduce weed biomass by 75% for grass CCs, but only 40% for non-grass CCs (Fig. 3). This is within the range reported for Pennsylvania grain-production systems, which require 2-6 Mg ha-1 to achieve ‘significant’ weed suppression (Baribar et al. 2018).

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| **Figure 3** A 75% reduction in weed biomass required 5 Mg ha-1 of grass cover crop biomass at termination. |

In an assessment of monoculture and mixed CCs performed in Iowa (Kaspar and Baker 2015, Appelgate 2017), other places…, a winter rye (*Secale cereal L.*) monoculture was among the top biomass producers of the species screened, but with averages still well under 2 Mg ha-1. Our modelling results demonstrate achieving 5 Mg ha-1 of rye CC biomass regularly under typical mid-western US production scenarios and climates may be challenging (Fig. 4).

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| **Figure 4** Probabilities of achieving 5 Mg ha-1 rye (Secale cereal) biomass for a September 15, October 7, and November 1 planting date; probabilities are based on 30 years of historical weather data using a process-based model SALUS (? Rafa I need help with this label) |

Delaying planting to maximize CC biomass will almost always result in a loss of cash crop yield (e.g. Bollero and Bullock 1994, Baum et al. 2018). Farmer research in Iowa has shown terminating a rye CC at least a week before planting is crucial to preventing yield drag in maize (Arlan May 3, 2019 PFI report, need others….). In soybean, however, allowing the CC to continue growing even after soybean planting has shown no significant effect on yields and has anecdotally improved weed control (cite PFI report). Unfortunately in some conservation districts producers are required to terminate CCs within a pre-defined window before cash crop planting to remain eligible for subsidized crop insurance (CITE), which limits use of delayed termination as a method to increase weed suppression services of CCs. Fertilization of CCs is also another tactic that may increase CC biomass, but would result in an additional cost to producers and may negate nutrient pollution mitigation services. Early fall planting may therefore be the best tactic for increasing weed suppression provided by CCs. Other ecosystem services of CCs are strongly related to CC biomass, including reduced nitrate leaching and erosion control, meaning increasing CC biomass may represent a multiple-win situation for environmental service. Research supporting CC planting equipment, breeding, and other agronomic innovations will be needed to optimize CC services such as weed control.

*3.3.3 Tillage and termination method*

Interestingly, in our database the tillage regime of the overall system had no effect on the weed suppression of the CC (supplemental table X). A previous meta-analysis found cash crop diversification significantly reduced weed density, and this effect was amplified in no-till systems (Weisberger et al. 2019). For CCs, which did not reduce weed density in our study, no-till offers no advantages with regard to weed control. This is likely because cash crop diversification and incorporation of CCs are affecting different phases of the weed cycle, exemplified by the fact that cash crop diversification affected only weed density, and CC incorporation only weed biomass. basically cash crop diversification probably increases seedling death, while CCs only reduces weed biomass.

The CC biomass was an important predictor for weed suppression in our analysis and previous studies (CITE). Because herbicide-based termination leaves CC biomass on the soil surface, it was surprising herbicide termination did not enhance CC-induced weed suppression. The lack of significance of termination method may indicate both allelopathy and physical interference with weed growth are both important components of CC weed suppression.

I’m not sure this is relevant, but I need to think about it:

Further, evidence from studies in the southeast suggests that herbicides applied later in the season or with residual action were most effective at weed control in tandem with CCs (Norsworthy et al. 2016; Wiggins et al. 2014; Montgomery et al. 2018).

**3.4 Tradeoffs in managing weeds and cash crop yields**

Other meta-analyses have looked specifically at the effects of CCs on subsequent cash crop yields (Miguez et al. 2005, Marcillo et al. 2017), however assessing whether there is a trade-off in managing CCs for weed control versus yield maintenance is a useful question. In our data, we found a no indication such a tradeoff exists (Chi-square statistic = 1.78, p-value=0.18), with decreased cash crop yields being equally likely in scenarios with more or less weed pressure. However, while both our study and yield-focused studies found the species of CC is one of the most important management choices affecting CC services, choosing a species to maximize cash crop yields versus weed suppression may be at odds. Our study found grass CCs offer more weed suppression compared to non-grasses, but the yield meta-analyses found non-grass CCs increased cash crop yields more than grasses. Only 23% of the comparisons exhibited a ‘win-win’ situation, with a concomitant increase in cash crop yield and decrease in weed pressure (Fig. 4). Using a random forest model, we found no factors that were strong predictors of whether an observation would fall in the win-win category, again suggesting maximizing cash crop yields and weed suppression may not have overlapping management strategies.

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Another concerning trend is the extremeness of the responses for decreased yield. While other meta-analyses have looked at *average* yield responses, the question of whether CCs can stabilize yields or expose producers to additional risks has not been directly addressed. Our database indicates that while CCs do not significantly decrease yields on average, yield decreases, when they do occur, are more severe than yield increases (Fig. X). This is an area that merits further research.

**3.5 Environmental and experimental context**

We found the context under which the trials were done (aridity index, soil type, soil OM) had no significant effect on the outcomes of the research (list table or figure from which that finding derives). This is not surprising because our indices are static. In other words this suggests that the environment under which a cover crop is grown is less important at determining its efficacy to control weeds than management factors. This runs somewhat contrary to the conventional recommendations which suggest that “one size does not fit all” when it comes to agriculture (cite). Although site specific considerations are still critical for making agronomic recommendations, these results . In a global meta-analysis, Basche and DeLonge (2019) similarly found that soil type and climate were not significant moderators of the efficacy of CCs to increase water infiltration. This also suggests that cover crop weed research done within the contiguous Corn Belt is valid for maize and soybean systems grown throughout, so open knowledge sharing via organizations such as the Midwest CCs Council and University extension materials developed within this area may provide valuable recommendations for the entire region. Discuss?

Studies that measure weeds before cash crop planting may over-estimate the weed suppressive effects of CCs. Weeds measured after crop emergence are likely of more interest to producers, as they will have survived the stresses of CC termination, crop planting, and pre-emergent herbicide application, and thus may represent true resource competition with the cash crop (CITE NATALIE’S PAPER).

We found the cash crop following the cover crop (maize or soybean) had no effect on the measured response. This indicates the effects of the cover crop on weeds is not confounded by the differences in crop competition with weeds.

While CC offer clear cost savings with regard to weed control and competition for organic Midwestern producers (Silva and Delate 2017) ?? did we see this in our dtabse? There were only a few organic studies.

**4. Conclusions**

Weed biomass and density responded similarly to CCs and their associated factors, with weed biomass responding more strongly. Reductions in weed density were likely less significant due to the short-term nature of the included studies (X-X years). Long term (+5 years) studies are needed to better understand if repeated reductions in weed biomass from cover crop use can reduce weed densities over time. Cover crop biomass production of at least 4 Mg ha-1 is needed to see a meaningful decrease in weed pressure. Independent of biomass production, grass species are the most effective at suppressing weeds. In conclusion, CCs reduce weed biomass and may decrease weed density, but these reductions may be hard to achieve in Corn Belt production systems, and may not translate to an increase in yields.

*Organic experiments*

*There were four organic experiments in the database and they were less effective at controlling weeds and improving yields; none of those response ratios fell into the win-win category.*

*Figure: Possible win win plot just for organic experiments, or distribution of these studies together*

Other potential discussion points:

Community of weeds vs individual weed species?

Is the method of planting stimulating weeds?

Possible long term weed seed bank changes with a cover crop

Management of herbicide resistant weeds

CC biomass relationship to yield

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture-National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017 Census of Agriculture. USDA-NASS: Washington, D.C., 2019, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/.

Process-based cropping system models such as APSIM (cite) and SALUS (cite) are powerful tools for integrating weather, soil, and management interactions to both explore historical cropping system behaviors and to predict future trajectories (Cite). Process-based models have been used to assess and predict crop-weed competition (Dean et al. 2003, Grenz et al. 2006), as well as to provide insight into how CCs interact with cropping systems (Basche et al. 20XX; Martinez-Feria et al. 2016).

It is clear from previous work that CC weed suppression increases with CC biomass (cite). Previous studies have incorporated simple temperature-based models to predict CC phenology and/or biomass (that pennsyl one) to aid in interpretation and prediction of CC weed control (Mirsky et al. 2009, Baraibar et al. 2019).