



## COVER CROPS UP FOR DEBATE

### GRADES 9-12

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are two sides to every story. You learned in “Slow Jam Cover Crops” that there are many benefits to cover crops, and many reasons for farmers to use them. However, not all farmers are moved by arguments in favor of using cover crops on their land. Through debate in the classroom, students will learn about cover crops and water quality issues by researching topics, organizing ideas, forming opinions and learning how to craft a persuasive argument.



[WATCH SLOW JAM - COVER CROPS](#)

#### PROCEDURE

1. Choose a statement or question on which to focus the lightning/speed debate such as:
  - Does Iowa need cover crops?
  - All farmers should be required to use cover crops.
  - Should the government offer cash bonuses for farming with a conservation ethic?
  - The benefits of cover crops outweigh the costs.
  - Which is more important: clean water or profit?
2. Start with an individual brainstorming session. Have students spend five minutes thinking about arguments for both a “pro” (positive) position on the issue and a “con” (negative) position on the issue. As students brainstorm, have them write their main points (in keywords) on Post-it notes or small pieces of paper with tape at the top.
3. Divide the classroom into two groups – one will be the “pro” team and the other will be the “con” team. Place a sheet of paper in the middle of each group – as students share their ideas, stick the ideas onto the sheet of paper. Group ideas together that are similar.
4. On a new sheet of paper, have each group write down six main arguments to use during the classroom debate. Combine similar arguments and get rid of insignificant or weak arguments. Summarize each argument in just a few words and give each argument a title.

5. Divide main arguments between two rounds. Each team should present three arguments in round one and three arguments in round two. In round three, no new arguments should be presented unless they are part of a rebuttal. Each group member should participate in the debate at least once.
6. Assign speaking duties and determine what each person will say. Each team will have minimal time to state their arguments and must use the time wisely. For each round, each team should use the following structure:
  - **Introduction** – state your basic “pro” or “con” position on the debate topic
  - **Rebuttal** – respond to any points that the previous speaker made (not applicable to first speaker)
  - **Argument** – summarize your argument and include any supporting data (facts, reasoning, evidence, analogies, examples) to support your argument
7. Appoint one person from each team to keep track of time. A classroom debate schedule is below.

Round 1		
Team 1	Presentation of “pro” – 3 points	1 minute
Team 2	Rebuttal Presentation of “con” – 3 points	1 minute
Team discussion		2 minutes
Round 2		
Team 1	Presentation of “pro” – 3 points	2 minutes
Team 2	Rebuttal Presentation of “con” – 3 points	2 minutes
Team discussion		2 minutes
Round 3		
Team 1	Rebuttal Summary of team case	1 minute
Team 2	Rebuttal Summary of team case	1 minute

**OPTIONAL EXPANSION ACTIVITY:** Following the classroom debate, have students write a persuasive essay about the key statement or question the class debated. Students should take either the “pro” or “con” side and defend that viewpoint. Students can draw from arguments presented in the classroom debate, arguments that were discussed in their group or arguments that they thought of on their own, but they must cite at least three reputable sources to back up their arguments.