

Observational Metrics

Ground Cover

Ecological Process:	The Water Cycle, The Nutrient Cycle
Why Monitor This Metric?	Ground cover is a fantastic farm management tool that helps maintain soil temperature while protecting the soil from the impact of rain and other external stresses. Keeping soil covered throughout the year reduces soil erosion, thereby preventing nutrient loss to runoff. Monitoring ground cover gives greater insight into how covered soil holds more water, keeps soil cool, and prevents nutrient loss.
Tools Needed:	Measuring Tape, Garden Stakes, Pen/Pencil, Data Sheet/Paper

The Process:

1. Identify an area where you would like to measure ground cover.
2. Using the measuring tape, lay out a 10' long transect. If required, use stakes to hold down the measuring tape in position.
3. On your data sheet or paper, create a grid with increments on one side and a space for a check mark on the other side.
4. Walk along the transect and examine the ground at every 1' interval. If the ground immediately adjacent to the 1' interval is covered by a plant, mulch, or litter (living or dead), put a checkmark beside the increment on your data sheet. If the ground is bare, leave the space blank on your data sheet.
5. Once you have examined each 1' increment on the transect, count how many checkmarks you placed on your data sheet. Divide the number of covered ground points by the number of total points, and then multiply by 100%. This number will give you the percentage of ground cover in the sample area.

Use Your Observations to Rate Ground Cover (adapted from ROC)

- Poor: less than 35%.
- Fair: between 35-50%.
- Good: greater than 50%.