United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

2011 Ranking Period 1

Soil Quality Enhancement Activity –SQL04- Use of cover crop mixes

Enhancement Description
This enhancement is for the use of cover crop mixes that contain two (2) or more different species of cover crops.

Land Use Applicability
Cropland.

Benefits
The use of a cover crop mixture that contains two (2) or more plants is often more effective then a planting of single species cover crop. Cover crop mixtures adapt to variation in soils, increase biomass production, provide broader spectrum of weed control, have better winter survival and ground cover and attract a range of beneficial insects. Nutrients can be trapped or produced depending on existing soil conditions and plants used. Mixes can be a grass/legume, multiple cultivars of a single species, or a mix containing plants with different growth patterns, e.g. fast and slow, tall and short.

Criteria

1. Cover crop mixes must contain a minimum of two (2) different plant species or cultivars of a single species with different maturity dates.
2. Cover crop species will be selected from state specific lists in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.
3. Crops planted following cover crop must be no-tilled.
4. Nutrient applications for crops following cover crop should consider nitrogen fixation from leguminous cover crops.

Documentation Requirements

1. Written documentation for each year of this enhancement describing the following items:
    a. Cover crop species used and dated planted
    b. Date and amount of fertilizer applied
    c. Method to kill cover crop and date completed
    d. Crop planted after cover crop and method used
1. A map showing fields where the enhancement is applied
2. Photographs of a representative number of fields showing cover crop mix