



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY

E340G

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Cover crop to reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excess soil nutrients

Conservation Practice 340: Cover Crop

APPLICABLE LAND USE: Crop (Annual & Mixed); Crop (Perennial)

RESOURCE CONCERN: Water

ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 1 Year

Enhancement Description

Establish a cover crop mix to take up excess soil nutrients. Select cover crop species for their ability to effectively utilize nutrients. Terminate the cover crop as late as practical to maximize plant biomass production and nutrient uptake. Cover crop shall not be harvested, grazed, or burned.

Criteria

- Plant species, seedbed preparation, seeding rates, seeding dates, seeding depths, fertility requirements, and planting methods will be consistent with applicable local criteria and soil/site conditions (**REFER TO STATE SPECIFIC LISTS**).
- Determine method and timing of cover crop termination to meet grower's objective and current NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines. *Terminate the cover crop as late as practical to maximize plant biomass production and nutrient uptake.*
- Select species that are compatible with other components of the cropping system.
- Ensure herbicides used with crops are compatible with cover crop selections.

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- Cover crops may be established between successive production crops, or companion-planted or relay-planted into production crops. Select species and planting dates that will not compete with production crop yield or harvest.
- Do not remove cover crop biomass or burn cover crop residue.
- Do not harvest or graze cover crop.
- If specific rhizobium bacteria for selected legumes are not present in the soil, treat seed with appropriate inoculum at time of planting.
- Select cover crop species for their ability to efficiently scavenge excess soil nutrients. Nutrient uptake only occurs when the cover crop is actively growing. Once the cover crop is terminated and begins to degrade the plant available nutrients that had been up taken by the cover crop will be released back to the soil. Therefore, it is imperative that the following production crop be planted as soon as possible after cover crop termination to maximize nutrient cycling and minimize offsite transport of nutrients.



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Documentation and Implementation Requirements

Participant will:

- Prior to implementation, provide NRCS with the current and planned crop rotation and field operation(s) used for each crop.

Document excess nutrients identified in soil tests: Soil tests should be taken as close to production crop harvest as possible.

Field	Soil Test Date	Nutrient	Soil Test Nutrient Result (ppm or lbs/ac)

Planned Management Rotation Including Cover Crop

Field	Planned Crops/Cover Crop (in sequence)	Planting Date	Harvest/Termination Date

Cover Crop Mix and Seeding Rate

Species	Variety	Seed Size	Typical Seeding Depth	Seeding Rate (PLS lbs/acre)	Percent of Mix (%)

Establishment and Management Considerations:

- Establish cover crops as soon as practical prior to or after harvest of the production crop.



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Task	Provide information and details
Seedbed Preparation	
Seeding Date	
Seeding Depth	
Seeding Method	
Fertilizer, as needed	
Weed Management, as needed	
Termination Date (window)	
Termination Method	

- Prior to implementation, read and follow current [NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines](#).
- During implementation, cover crops must not be grazed, burned, harvested or biomass removed.
- During implementation, notify NRCS of any planned changes in crops, crop rotation, or unharvested areas to verify the planned system meets the enhancement criteria.
- After implementation, if changes to the cover crop and crop rotation were made, complete the tables above to document the applied Cover Crop for the contract period and provide to NRCS.

NRCS will:

- As needed, provide technical assistance in selecting cover crop mixes for the crop rotations or substitute species that would meet the criteria of the enhancement.
- As needed, provide additional assistance to the participant as requested.
- Prior to implementation, provide and explain the current [NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines](#).
- During implementation, evaluate planned adjustments in cover crop selected, timing in crop rotation, management, or field operations to verify the new system meets the enhancement criteria.



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- After implementation, evaluate the applied crop rotation or management using information provided from the participant, if any variation to planned evaluation, document that the applied rotation met the enhancement criteria.

NRCS Documentation Review:

I have reviewed all required participant documentation and have determined the participant has implemented the enhancement and met all criteria and requirements.

Participant Name _____ Contract Number _____

Total Amount Applied _____ Fiscal Year Completed _____

NRCS Technical Adequacy Signature Date

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**IOWA SUPPLEMENT TO
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Additional Criteria for Iowa

- State list of approved Cover Crop species, seeding rate, seeding dates, seeding depths and planting methods for utilizing excess soil nutrients can be found in the current 340 Iowa Implementation Requirements for Cover Crops.
- Mixes may be developed using the Midwest Cover Crops Council Cover Crop Decision Tool for Iowa <http://mccc.msu.edu/selector-tool/>. Filter the list of potential cover crops for your county by selecting the first goal as nitrogen scavenger.
- Nitrate-nitrogen is the nutrient to soil test annually. Use 24 inch cores for soil samples.
- At least 50% of the seeding mix must be winter hardy grass cover crop species.
 - Winter Cereal Rye
 - Winter Triticale
 - Winter Wheat