

NRCS Cover Crop EQIP Policies

SUMMARY OF RULES AND REGULATIONS

New Jersey Farmers are eligible for cover crop funding through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

HOW TO APPLY

Contact your local NRCS office to apply. NRCS accepts and processes EQIP applications on a continuous basis, but sets application periods to review applications and award contracts.

View Current Funding Opportunities for current application periods at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives.

ENROLLING ACRES

For the Soil Health Initiative, Cover Crop must be implemented for a minimum of three consecutive years. Farmers with a rotation that includes small grains and perennials can work with their planner to ensure there are at least three years of cover crop within the full crop rotation. Shorter contracts (< three years) are possible through conventional EQIP.

Once a field has been included in a contract, that field is not eligible for the same level of cover crop on any future contract even if it was only applied once to that field.

COMPARING FUNDING COVER CROP OPPORTUNITIES

NRCS offers two different options for cover crop funding through EQIP. Talk to your soil conservationist to learn which option is right for you.

Soil Health Initiative EQIP		Conventional EQIP						
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EQIP eligibility requirements apply Producers are given priority to be funded Tracts that received funding through EQIP for single species cover crop qualify for additional funding through the Soil Health Initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EQIP eligibility requirements apply Must rank eligibility based on screening and ranking criteria; land not at risk of erosion may not qualify without other resource concerns Land previously enrolled in the Soil Health Initiative WILL NOT qualify 						
Contract Length	Same acreage for three or five consecutive years.	One year or three year contracts; tracts eligible for renewal only if a greater diversity cover crop is being planned; up to five annual payments allowed						
Cover Crop Species	The seeding mix must include a minimum of three species from at least two plants groups (example: two small grains and a legume)	Only single species required, although higher payment rates available for multi-species mixes						
Planting Time-frame <small>*See NRCS Cover Crop (340) Technical Reference for complete species list</small>		Rye & Wheat	Annual Ryegrass	Oats	Triticale	Radish & Rapeseed	Hairy Vetch Field Peas,	Crimson, White, & Red Clover
	Zone 6a & 6b	8/1 – 10/31	8/1 – 9/15	8/1 – 10/15	8/15 – 10/15	8-1 – 9/15	8-1 – 9/15	8/15 – 9-15
	Zone 7a & 7b	9/1 – 10/31	8/1 – 9/15	9/1 – 10/31	9/1 – 10/31	9/1 – 10/1	9/1 – 10/1	9/1 – 10/1
Spring Use Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No harvesting for hay, straw, seed, or oil allowed Cover crop can be grazed, but increased seeding rates and monitoring is required 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No harvesting for seed or oil 				

COVER CROP APPLICATION GUIDELINES



Rate and Mixture Determination

NRCS soil conservationists will work closely with producers to develop a cover crop mixture and/or application rate that addresses soil health needs that are dependent on soil type, application method, and cover crop termination plan.

To be eligible for the multiple species cover crop payment, the seeding mix must include a minimum of three species from at least two plant groups (example: two small grains and a legume).



Seed purchase and standards

Generally, farmers must apply **Certified Seed** to receive funding through any NRCS EQIP program. A seed tag must be provided to NRCS. However, if a farmer is interested in **using homegrown or other non-certified local seed**, seed must be tested prior to planting for purity, germination, and noxious weeds. Test results must be provided to NRCS. Alternatively, farmers using non-certified seed may still qualify for reimbursement if percent cover exceeds 70% in the spring. Percent cover will be verified by a NRCS employee in the spring between April 1st and May 15th.



Application timing

Seeds need to be applied by the program deadlines outlined on the previous page. Farmers who miss the seeding deadline may still qualify for reimbursement if percent cover exceeds 70% in the spring. Percent cover will be verified by a NRCS employee in the spring between April 1st and May 15th.

To meet the application deadline for multi-species cover crop in grain/bean crop systems, farmers can consider either aerial applying or interseeding cover crop with a high clearance spreader; both practices establish cover crop within standing cash crops prior to cash crop harvest.

COVER CROP TERMINATION GUIDELINES



Termination method

Cover crop can be killed using herbicide, tillage, roller crimping, or mowing.



Termination timing

For summer cover, crop must be allowed to grow for 60-90 days after planting.

Fall and winter cover crops need to be allowed to grow for 120 days.



Alternative Cover Crop Uses

Cover crop contracted through conventional EQIP may be grazed or harvested for straw, hay, haylage, etc., only if the cover crop is planned for the purpose of reducing erosion from wind and water or minimizing soil compaction. No harvesting for seed or oil is allowed.

Cover Crop contracted through the Soil Health Initiative can be grazed, but increased seeding rates and monitoring are required. No harvesting for straw, hay, haylage, seed, or oil is allowed.