



CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITY

E340H

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Cover crops to suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles

Conservation Practice 340: Cover Crop

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

RESOURCE CONCERN: Plants

ENHANCEMENT LIFE SPAN: 1 Year

Enhancement Description

Establish a cover crop mix to suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles. Select cover crop species for their life cycles, growth habits, and other biological, chemical and/or physical characteristics. Select cover crop species that do not harbor pests or diseases of subsequent crops in the rotation. 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.
- 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 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 that do not harbor pests or diseases of subsequent crops in the rotation. Select cover crop species for their life cycles, growth habits, and other biological, chemical and or physical characteristics to provide one or more of the following:
 - To suppress weeds or compete with weeds.
 - Break pest life cycles or suppress of plant pests or pathogens.
 - Provide food or habitat for natural enemies of pests.
 - Release compounds such as glucosinolates that suppress soil borne pathogens or pests.



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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.

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:

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](#).



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- 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.
- 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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ALABAMA – E340H Supplement- Cover crop to suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles

Requirements:

- Applicable where cover crops have not been planted in the past. Cover crops must be grown during all non-crop periods and shall not be harvested or grazed.
- Crops planted following the cover crop must be no-tilled or strip-tilled.
- Calculate before and after soil loss for the field to be planted.
- when weed suppression is the primary objective, the cover crop should be managed for maximum biomass production and rolled prior to planting. Tall cover crops can be rolled more effectively; rye or a mix with rye is recommended for this purpose.
- when breaking pest life cycles or pest suppression is the primary objective, legumes are not generally recommended when soybean, peanut and cotton are in the rotation. Brassicas have good potential for this purpose. Do not plant wheat for a cover crop if wheat for grain is in the rotation.
- increase seeding rates by 30% if aerially applied.
- Cover crops should be planted as early as possible and terminated as late as practical for maximum biomass production. Do not terminate greater than 30 days prior to crop planting. Refer to Alabama Guide Sheet AL340A, Cover Crop Termination Timing.
- Minimum requirement is a **single species** or **mix** that includes a **small grain, or small grain-brassica mix**. In addition, sorghum-sudangrass is a warm season annual that may fit in a rotation with a short-season summer crop. Radish provides excellent early fall growth if planted timely. Ryegrass may not be used. Cover crop should be at least 24 inches tall prior to termination. Due to the early planting date for corn, do not use for weed suppression prior to corn planting unless sufficient cover crop growth has been made to form a dense mat when rolled.
- Complete the tables on the national jobsheet for documentation. In addition, receipts, copy of seed tags, weight tickets, etc. are needed. Photographs should be taken immediately prior to termination.
- Follow planting guidelines according to NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 340-Cover Crop or plant according to the table below. Other mixes may be approved by the state agronomist.

	Minimum lbs./ac
1 species-Small grain*	65 lbs.
1 species-daikon radish	8 lbs.
2 species-small grain and clover	50 lbs. + 10 lbs.
2 species-small grain and brassica	50 lbs. + 3 lbs.
3 species-small grain, clover, brassica	40 lbs. + 10 lbs. + 3 lbs.

*small grains- rye, wheat, oats, barley, and triticale
 Legumes-crimson clover, vetch, Austrian winter pea
 Brassicas-daikon radish, turnip, rape

TABLE 1. PLANTS COMMONLY USED FOR COVER CROPS IN ALABAMA

Forage Crop	Seeding Rate (lb/A)	Seeding Depth (in.)	Planting Date			Remarks
			North	Central	South	
<u>Warm Season Annual Grasses</u>						
Millet, Browntop, Proso, & Foxtail	Drill 20 B-Cast 30	½ - ¾	May 1–Aug 1	Apr 1-Aug 15	Apr 1-Aug 15	Well drained, productive soils.
Millet, Pearl	Drill 15 B-Cast 30	½ - 1½	Apr 20-Jul 1	Apr 15-Jul 1	Apr 1-Jul 15	Adapted to clay and loam soils with good summer moisture. Avoid calcareous Black Belt soils.
Sorghum-Sudan Hybrids	Drill 25 B-Cast 35	½ - 1	May 1–Aug 1	Apr 15-Aug 1	Apr 1–Aug 15	Well drained, productive soils.
Sorghum, Forage	Rows 5 B-Cast 20	1	Apr 20-May 15	Apr 20-May 15	Apr 20-Jul 1	Well drained, productive soils.
Sudangrass	Drill 25 B-Cast 35	½ - 1	May 1-Aug 1	May 1-Aug 1	May 1-Aug 1	Light sandy to heavy clay soils.
<u>Cool Season Annual Grasses</u>						
Small Grains (Oats, Rye, Wheat, Barley, Triticale)	90-120	1 – 2	Sep 1–Nov 1	Sep 15–Nov 1	Sep 15-Nov 15	Rye is better adapted to well drained, sandy to loam soil and is more tolerant of soil acidity than wheat or oats; Oats are cold sensitive & subject of winter kill, especially in the northern half of Alabama; Wheat more tolerant of heavy wet soils.

Table 1. (cont.) Plants Commonly Used for Cover Crops in Alabama

Forage Crop	Seeding Rate (lb/A)	Seeding Depth (in.)	Planting Date			Remarks
			North	Central	South	
<u>Warm Season Annual Legumes</u>						
Lespedeza, Annual	30	¼ - ½	Feb 15-Apr 1	Feb 15-Apr 1	-	Needs good drainage; tolerant of drought; low fertility and soil acidity. Avoid lime soils of Black Belt.
<u>Cool Season Annual Legumes</u>						
Austrian Winter Peas	40	1-2	Sept 1-Oct 15	Sept 1-Oct	Sept 1-Oct 15	Best on well drained soils.
Caley Peas	50	½ - 1	Sep 1-Oct 15	Sep 1-Oct 15	Sep 1-Oct 15	Adapted to alkaline and moderately acid Black Belt soil. Seeds are toxic.
Clover, Arrowleaf <i>(see note "F" if seed is coated)</i>	6	0 - ½	Aug 25-Oct 1	Sep 1-Oct 15	Sep 15-Nov 1	Overseed 5 weeks later. Best on well drained soils. Avoid Black Belt soils.
Clover, Ball <i>(see note "F" if seed is coated)</i>	4	0 - ¼	Sep 1-Oct 31	Sep 1-Oct 31	Sep 1-Oct 31	Adapted to most soils. Reseeds well and tolerates wet soils and flooding.
Clover, Crimson <i>(see note "F" if seed is coated)</i>	25	0 - ½	Aug 25-Oct 1	Sep 1-Oct 15	Sep 15-Nov 1	Avoid high pH soils. Best on well drained soils. Overseed 5 weeks later.
Clover, Red <i>(see note "F" if seed is coated)</i>	Drill 8 B-Cast 15	¼ - ½	Sep 15-Nov 15 Or Feb 1-Apr 1	Sep 15-Nov 15 Or Feb 1-Apr 1	Sep 15-Nov 15 -	Fertile, well drained soils.

Table 1. (cont.) Plants Commonly Used for Cover Crops in Alabama

Forage Crop	Seeding Rate (lb/A)	Seeding Depth (in.)	Planting Date			Remarks
			North	Central	South	
Clover, Subterranean <i>(see note "F" if seed is coated)</i>	10	¼ - ½	Aug 25-Oct 1	Sep1-Oct 31	Sep1-Oct 31	Best on well drained, productive soils.
Vetch, Common <i>(see note "F" if seed is coated)</i>	35	1-2	--	Sep 1-Oct 15	Sep 15-Nov 1	Best on well drained soils. Certain varieties can freeze if planted late, especially in north Alabama. Nova II is the least cold tolerant.
Vetch, Hairy <i>(see note "F" if seed is coated)</i>	25	1-2	Sep 1 –Oct 15	Sep 1-Oct 15	Sep 15-Nov 1	Best on well drained soils.
Brassicas Daikon radish (Tillage radish)	5	0.25 – 0.5	Aug 30	Sept 15	Sept 20	Adapted to most soils.
Rape/Canola	5	0.25 – 0.75	Aug 15	Aug 30	Sept 15	Adapted to most soils.
Turnip/Purple top	5	0.25 – 0.75	Aug 20	Aug 30	Sept 15	Adapted to most soils.

NOTES:

- A. Drill = Drilled and B-Cast = Broadcast.
- B. Where legumes are seeded with grasses, use the seeding dates for the grasses.
- C. Where two or more grasses are used in a mixture, reduce the seeding rate of each by about one-third. Reduce the

seeding rates of legumes by about 50% when used in the mixtures of three.

- D. Seeding rates should be increased at least 30% when aerially seeded.
- E. Seeding rates for a cost-share program shall be the rate specified by the program.
- F. Consider the weight of the coated seed in your seeding recommendation to adjust for the proper PLS rate.

GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS FOR SPECIES ADAPTATION AND SEEDING DATES

