

Cover Crop

Definition/Purpose

- A crop of grasses, legumes, small grain, or brassicas grown primarily for seasonal vegetative protection, erosion control and soil improvement. Cover crops are typically grown for one year or less.
- The practice can be implemented to support one or more of the following purposes:
 - Reduce erosion from wind and water.
 - Reduce water quality degradation by utilizing excessive soil nutrients.
 - Improve infiltration of rainfall
 - Maintain or increase soil health and organic matter content.
 - Suppress excessive weed pressures and break pest cycles.
 - Improve soil moisture use efficiency.
 - Minimize soil compaction.
- To be eligible for cost share through NC ACSP the cover crop must result in documented water quality benefits from reduced soil erosion (wind and water) and/or nutrient scavenging.

POLICIES

1. This practice can be contracted at the following rates:

Management	Unit Cost	Cost Share 75% rate	Cost Share 90% rate
Cover Crop	\$80/acre	\$60/acre	\$72/acre

2. This practice may be contracted annually OR for up to 3 years.
3. Cover crops contracted for more than one year, may be planted on different acres each year of the contract.
4. Plant species, seedbed preparation, seeding rates, seeding dates, seeding depths, fertility requirements, and planting methods will be consistent with soil/site conditions and the criteria in the [NRCS Cover Crop Practice Standard—Specifications Development Tables](#).
5. Multiple species cover crop mixes are allowable.
6. The specifications in the NRCS Development Tables should always be followed when possible. If deviations from the specifications are necessary, any variabilities must be supported by NCDA regional agronomists, county extension agents, or NRCS area office staff.
7. Certified seed or bin seed may be used for this cost share practice in order to receive payment. Cooperators using bin seed must be careful to adhere to the restrictions imposed by the federal Plant Variety Protection Act, the NC seed rules and statutes, and laws governing the use of seed from patented plants.
8. Planting outside of the provided seeding date ranges is not recommended.

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9. If an applicant must plant outside of the specified seeding dates, due to unforeseen circumstances, the decision must be well documented.
10. Planting outside of specified seeding dates may require a substantial increase in seeding rates to achieve the intended purpose of the practice.
11. Any variabilities in cover crop seeding specifications must still result in a cover crop stand that meets the intended purpose of the practice.
12. The planner is responsible for the seeding specification provided to the producer, including local/regional adaptability of cover crop type.
13. Drill or broadcast methods of seeding may be used. Drilling is the preferred seeding method and should be encouraged when possible.
14. If broadcast methods of seeding are used:
 - a. Seeding rates should be substantially increased to account for poor seed to soil contact.
 - b. Seed should be broadcast prior to harvest of soybeans and cotton; during the defoliation pass or before leaf drop.
15. Seedbed preparation may be done by any suitable implement or method. Seedbed preparation may be eliminated when cover crops are seeded by broadcasting.
16. Fertilizer (organic or inorganic) application to cost shared cover crops is prohibited.
17. Cover crop stand adequacy must be certified and documented after the cover crop has been established (installation) and again prior to the termination of the cover crop as a final inspection and check-out.
 - a. Establishment (Installation) Certification – Verify the planned establishment specifications below were followed by the producer as closely as possible:
 - i. Planting date
 - ii. Seeding mix
 - iii. Seeding rate
 - iv. Planting method
 - b. Final Inspection and Check-out – **Prior** to termination, determine if the cover crop:
 - i. Reached a maturity level and density to address the identified resource concern(s),
 - ii. Achieved the practice purpose(s) and associated standard criteria, and
 - iii. Met the producer's objective.
 - c. Practice payment can be made after the final inspection and check-out if the cover crop adequately met the requirements above.
 - d. If the cover crop did not adequately meet the practice requirements, the applicant may:

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- i. Reestablish the cover crop at a later date, before the contract expires.
 1. The cover crop may be reestablished in different fields than originally planned, if needed.
 2. If new fields are planted, the expected results must be revised to account for the change in fields.
 3. OR,
 - ii. Cancel the contract with no payment.
 1. If the applicant followed all specifications and the crop failed due to circumstances beyond their control, the cancellation shall not negatively affect the applicants local ranking score for future cost share contracts.
 - e. If only small portions of a field do not adequately meet the practice requirements, those areas should be excluded from payment calculations. The areas being excluded must be clearly delineated in the check-out documentation.
18. Determine method and timing of termination to meet grower's objective and current NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines.
 19. Cover crops may not be terminated more than 30 days before planting the succeeding crop.
 20. Only the acreage planted shall be considered for payments. The area occupied by farm roads, BMPs, ditches, structures, etc. shall not be included.
 21. Field offices unwilling to assist operators in achieving success and monitor cover crop establishment and stand quality should not offer this practice to cooperators in their district.
 22. If applicable, the Residue and Tillage Management practice may be contracted on the same acres as part of a conservation cropping system.
 23. Do NOT harvest or graze cover crops.
 24. No burning of crop residue will be permitted.
 25. Ensure herbicides used with crops are compatible with cover crop selections.

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COVER CROP	
Maintenance Period	1 year
BMP Units	ACRES
Required Effects	SOIL_SAVED NITROGEN_SAVED PHOSPHORUS_SAVED (If erosion present) ACRES-AFFECTED (planted acres)
JAA	SWCC - 340 - Cover Crop OR NRCS - ECS - 340 - Cover Crop
Supporting Practices	SWCC - 329 - Residue and Tillage Management NRCS - ECS - 328 - Conservation Crop Rotation NRCS - ECS- 329 - Residue and Tillage Management
Cost Information	Average cost (75% or 90%)
CS2 Reference Materials	NC-ACSP-11 Signature Page Map with BMP location, fields, and roads
Additional Spot-check Requirement	None