

Name of Practice: HARVESTABLE COVER CROP
VACS Program Specifications for No. SL-8H

This document specifies terms and conditions for the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program's Harvestable Cover Crop best management practice which are applicable to all contracts entered into with respect to that practice.

A. Description and Purpose

Cost-share or tax credits are provided for the establishment of vegetative cover on cropland for protection from raindrop and wind erosion and the reduction of nutrient losses to groundwater. For the purposes of this practice, cropland includes land used for production of row crops for harvest. The cover crop may be harvested after the requirements of this specification have been met.

This practice will provide an incentive to keep a cover on cropland, which will help prevent the loss of nutrients. The primary purpose is to reduce winter rain and wind generated erosion; a secondary purpose is to reduce the leaching of nutrients to ground water. This practice is not intended to subsidize winter crop production.

B. Policies and Specifications

1. Soil loss calculations using the presently approved NRCS calculation methodology shall be documented and included in the participant file for review during verifications.
2. In order to be eligible for cost-share or tax credit, producers must be fully implementing a current Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) on all agricultural production acreage contained within the field on which this practice will be implemented. The NMP must comply with all requirements set forth in the Nutrient Management Training and Certification Regulations (4VAC50-85 et seq.) and the Virginia Nutrient Management Standards and Criteria (revised July 2014); must be prepared and certified by a Virginia certified Nutrient Management Planner; and must be on file with the local District before any cost-share payment is made to the participant. Plans shall also contain any specific production management criteria designated in the BMP practice (4VACV50-85-130G).
3. No nutrients from any source are allowed between the harvesting of the previous crop and March 1 of the next calendar year, except that use of manure (with less than 40 lbs. N per acre tested) on up to 300 acres is permitted if all of the following conditions are met:
 - i. Animals are raised as part of the applicant's operation;
 - ii. Inadequate manure storage is available for the winter;
 - iii. There are no other vegetated acres available to safely utilize the manure;
 - iv. Manure is applied in accordance with a Nutrient Management Plan

prepared by a Virginia certified Nutrient Management Planner.

4. No nutrients may be applied at planting.
5. If available as set forth in Section C. 1. of this specification, cost-share is provided as a flat rate per acre incentive to encourage proper establishment of vegetative cover and to offset a portion of the cost of seed and the seeding operation.
6. A good stand and good growth of vegetative winter cover must be obtained by December 15 to protect the area from nutrient leaching and runoff in the fall and winter. All cover crop plantings must maintain a minimum of 60% cover crop plant material on the enrolled acres through the lifespan of the practice.
7. The practice is intended to provide an incentive to keep a vegetative cover on cropland, which will help prevent the loss of nutrients by reducing surface erosion and absorbing any excess nutrients from the soil. Current research indicates that early planting of winter rye maximizes the environmental benefit of cover crops in Virginia. The SL-8H is designed to provide an incentive to farmers to provide year round vegetative cover on as much acreage as possible; it is not intended to subsidize winter crops produced for commodity purposes or land already in permanent grass.
8. Harvesting for hay, haylage, silage, grain, or seed is permitted after March 14. Pasturing consistent with sound agronomic management is permitted as long as 60% cover is maintained through March 14.
9. Land enrolled in this practice may not be enrolled in another state cover crop practice and may not be converted to or from another cover crop practice. Enrolled acres are also ineligible for the NM-4 practice.
10. Select one of following species and/or mixtures of species to plant in all soils:

Species	bu./acre
Rye (Tetraploid)	2 bu./acre
Winter Rye (not tetraploid)	2 bu./acre
Winter Barley	2 bu./acre
Winter Hardy Oats	2 bu./acre
Winter Wheat or Triticale	2 bu./acre
Winter Annual ryegrass	20 lbs./acre
Small grain mixtures with	1 bu./acre
a) legume† or	10 lbs./acre
b) Diakon (forage or tillage) radish or	6 lb./ acre
c) canola or rape	4 lbs./acre
Diakon (forage or tillage) Radish	6-8 lbs./acre°

mixture with annual rye grass	10 lbs./acre
Winter-hardy <i>Brassica</i> (canola/rape)	5 -7 lbs./acre ^o
mixture with annual rye grass	10 lbs./acre

† legume = Crimson Clover, Austrian Winter Pea or Hairy Vetch

^oUse higher seeding rates for pure stands and lower seeding rates for mixed species plantings.

Higher seeding rates are recommended for aerial seeding and non-incorporation seeding methods.

11. Seeding of all seed types must be planted by the dates listed below:

Area	Planting Date
Cities of Chesapeake & VA Beach	November 10
Coastal Plain (including the Eastern Shore)	November 10
Piedmont	October 25
Mountain and Valley	October 20

12. Seeding rates shall be adjusted based on germination rates.
13. This practice is subject to NRCS standard 340 as applicable.
14. The cover crop residue may be left on the field for conservation purposes; or the cover crop or its residue may be tilled under; or the cover crop may be harvested after March 14.
15. For cover crop that is harvested for seed or grain only, leaving all remaining straw and residue on the field, a higher incentive rate is available. The seed or grain may be harvested after March 14, all remaining cover crop residue (including straw) must be left on the field for conservation. Straw cannot be cut and baled.

C. Rate(s)

1. A VACS payment rate of \$20 per acre is available for cover crop that is harvested for seed/grain and straw, remaining residue may be tilled under. Districts should not issue cost-share funds if a good stand and good growth of winter cover is not obtained before December 15 and maintained through March 14, with the exception of the Coastal Plain and the cities of Chesapeake and Virginia Beach that have November planting dates.
2. A VACS payment rate of \$30 per acre is available for cover crop that is harvested for seed/grain ONLY, all remaining residue must remain on the field (straw cannot be baled). Districts should not issue cost-share funds if a good stand and good growth of winter cover is not obtained before December 15 and

maintained through March 14, with the exception of the Coastal Plain and the cities of Chesapeake and Virginia Beach that have November planting dates.

3. As set forth by Virginia Code, the Commonwealth currently provides a tax credit for implementation of certain agricultural best management practices as discussed in the Tax Credit Guidelines of the VACS Manual.
4. The cost of fertilizer may not be considered when calculating the participant's tax credit. Participants may receive either a cost-share payment or a tax credit for implementation of this practice, but not both on the same acre.

D. Technical Responsibility

Technical and administrative responsibility is assigned to qualified technical DCR and District staff in consultation, where appropriate and based on the controlling standard, with DCR, Virginia Certified Nutrient Management Planner(s), NRCS, DOF, and VCE. Individuals certifying technical need and technical practice installation shall have appropriate certifications as identified above and/or Engineering Job Approval Authority (EJAA) for the designed and installed component(s). All practices are subject to spot check procedures and any other quality control measures.

Revised April 2024