

Name of Practice: VOLUNTARY SMALL GRAIN AND MIXED COVER CROP FOR
NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT AND RESIDUE MANAGEMENT
VACS Program Specifications for No. VSL-8B

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

A. Description and Purpose

This practice establishes vegetative cover on cropland for protection from erosion and the reduction of nutrient losses to groundwater.

This practice will provide an incentive to keep a cover on cropland, which will help prevent the loss of nutrients. The purpose is to reduce erosion and the leaching of nutrients to ground water. This BMP is designed to utilize the maximum amount of residual nitrogen from previous surface nutrient applications and in the first three feet of the soil profile.

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 spot checks.
2. No nitrogen and no phosphorus from any source are allowed between the harvesting of the previous crop and March 1 of the next calendar year. No nitrogen and no phosphorus are allowed at planting.
3. 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. Plans shall also contain any specific production management criteria designated in the BMP practice (4VACV50-85-130G).
4. A good stand and good growth of vegetative winter cover must be obtained by January 1 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.
5. Seeding rates shall be adjusted based on germination rates.

6. The practice is intended 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 cover crops environmental benefit in Virginia. This practice is not intended for land already in permanent grass.
7. Harvesting for hay, haylage, silage, grain, straw, or seed is not permitted. Pasturing consistent with sound agronomic management is permitted as long as cover is maintained through March 14. **In years of drought if producers anticipate a need for additional feed harvest, they should apply for the VSL-8H practice as harvest is not allowed under this practice.**
8. Select one of following species and/or mixtures of species to plant in all soils

Species	bu./acre
Cereal Rye	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) Daikon (forage or tillage) radish or	2 lb./acre
c) canola or rape	4 lbs./acre
Daikon (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°
mixture with annual rye grass	10 lbs./acre

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

°Use 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.

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

Area	Early Planting Date	Standard Planting Date
Cities of Chesapeake & VA Beach	November 10	November 30
Coastal Plain (including the Eastern Shore)	November 10	November 30
Piedmont	October 25	November 15
Mountain and Valley	October 20	November 10

10. In all cases, this practice is subject to NRCS Standard 340.

11. The cover crop must be killed using mechanical or chemical means or by grazing no earlier than March 15 and no later than June 1. The cover crop residue may be left on the field for conservation purposes or the cover crop or its residue may be tilled under. The practice will be considered complete once the cover crop has served its purpose and been killed. Residue may not be removed at any time.

C. 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 June 2026