

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

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

A. Description and Purpose

This practice is designed to keep a cover on cropland, which will help reduce winter rain and wind erosion; and reduce the leaching of nutrients to groundwater. The cover crop may be harvested after the requirements of this specification have been met.

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. 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).
3. No nitrogen and no phosphorus from any sources 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 lb. 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 nitrogen or phosphorus may be applied at planting.

5. 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 from January 1 through the lifespan of the practice.
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 environmental benefit of cover crops in Virginia. The VSL-8H is designed to provide year round vegetative cover on as much acreage as possible; it is not intended for commodity purposes.
7. Harvesting for hay, haylage, silage, grain, or seed is permitted after March 14. Pasturing consistent with sound agronomic management is permitted as long as cover is maintained through March 14.
8. 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.
9. 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
<i>Winter-hardy Brassica (canola/rape)</i>	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.**

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

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

11. Seeding rates shall be adjusted based on germination rates.
12. This practice is subject to NRCS Standard 340 as applicable.
13. 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.

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