N340 Cover Crop

Purpose
Provide operators an incentive to encourage the adoption of cover crops for reducing soil erosion, improving water quality and soil health.

The definition of operator for the purpose of this practice is any individual farming the land, who has incurred the expenses for the cover crops. The operator's name should also be listed on file with FSA as the operator of such land.

Applicability
Applies to cropland acres where row crops are grown and soil erosion needs to be prevented or water quality and soil health improved.

Erosion Requirements
Practice has no erosion requirements to qualify. However, pre- and post-erosion rates need to be recorded in MoSWIMS to capture the erosion benefits of the practice.

Specifications
The completed components of the practice must meet the NRCS Standards and Specifications for Conservation Crop Rotation (328) and Cover Crop (340) contained in the Field Office Technical Guide.

Policies

1. The contract must contain the name of the legal owner. If an operator is participating, the landowner must complete an "Operator Authorization" form.
2. Contracted acres must currently be in a minimum of a 2 species production crop rotation.
3. Cover crops must be no-tilled or broadcast seeded with either ground equipment or aerial.
4. Production crop following the cover crops must be planted using a no-till system on the contracted acres. No-till is defined as per standard 329 for Residue and Tillage Management No-Till.
5. Payment can be issued after no-till planting of the production crops into the (terminated) cover crops or after May 25 if the production crop has not yet been planted.
6. Cooperators must adopt cover crops in compliance with the **Cover Crop (340)** standard as part of this practice. In addition:
    a. All cover crop seedings must be planned with a minimum of 25% cool-season annual grass, small grain component or warm season grass. (Caution should be taken when selecting Annual Ryegrass for a cover crops mix.)
    b. Spring planted cover crops must have been planted at least 60 days prior to being terminated.

c. Cover crops will be terminated as late as practical to maximize plant biomass production and nutrient uptake. Landowners need to take into consideration timing for next crop and crop insurance requirements.

d. Cover crops will not be harvested for grain, seed or hayed.

e. Cover crops may be grazed once the forages have reached a minimum height of 6–8 inches with enough biomass produced to justify grazing. However, grazing should not occur if it will damage the forages so that their effectiveness as a cover crop would be impacted. Grazing will need to stop once the forages have been grazed down to 4 inches.

f. Tillage cannot be used to terminate the cover crops.

g. N595 Pest Management practice may be utilized to terminate the cover crops. The pest management plan must be developed to address the termination of the cover crop and all pest issues that may occur during the next production crop growing season.

h. A soil sample for the Initial Standard Soil Health Package test through the Missouri Soil Health Assessment Center (SHAC) must be taken on each field prior to seeding cover crops. The initial sample will need to be taken only for the first state cost-share contract on the field. The number of samples per field will be determined by the sampling requirements provided by SHAC.

   There is a second soil health test through SHAC called Follow-Up Standard Soil Health Package that landowners are encouraged to do four or five years after implementing cover crops on a field. If a landowner receives cost-share again on a field four or five years later to implement the practice, the landowner can receive a cost-share payment on the cost of the test. The number of samples per field will be determined by the sampling requirements provided by SHAC.

7. The NRCS MO JS Agron 340 Cover Crop Design Worksheet documentation must be scanned into MoSWIMS as supporting documentation when the contract is submitted for review.

Cost-share is authorized:

a. For incentive payments for operators (including landowner-operators) who implement all required components of the Cover Crop practice.
b. For soil health assessment testing through the University of Missouri SHAC for either the Initial Standard Soil Health Package or Follow-Up Standard Soil Health Package.

Cost-share is not authorized for:

a. Cover crops in pasture or hay land.

Maximum State Cost-Share

1. Operators participating in the Cover Crop practice will be eligible for 75% of the component cost of the test through SHAC and an incentive payment of $30/acre/year for a 1 or 2 species cover crop mix or $40/acre/year for 3 or more species cover crop mix with a life time maximum total payment of $20,000 per operator. Utilize Practice Limits Detail report in MoSWIMS to ensure compliance with applicable maximums.

Map Requirements
A map that displays the completed practice must be scanned and attached as "Map Document" in MoSWIMS prior to contract payment submission.

Technical Responsibilities
Technical staff has the responsibility for determining the need for the practice, for design of the practice based upon the minimum extent necessary, and to certify that the completed practice meets NRCS standards and specifications within commission policy. Tech II can approve.

Acres Served
Acreage planted in cover crops.

Extent Installed
Acres.

Maintenance Life
This practice is completed upon contract payment, therefore, the contract will not have a maintenance life.