Cover Crop

North Carolina Practice Job Sheet 340

Prepared for: _____

Prepared by: _____

Farm: _____ Tract: _____ Date: _____

Thick cover of rye is rolled to terminate growth and to provide more ground cover for a no-till crop to follow.

DEFINITION

Crops including grasses, legumes, and forbs, for seasonal cover and other conservation purposes.

PURPOSE

- ☐ Reduce erosion from wind and water.
- ☐ Increase soil organic matter content.
- ☐ Capture and recycle or redistribute nutrients in the soil profile.
- ☐ Promote biological nitrogen fixation.
- ☐ Increase biodiversity.
- ☐ Weed suppression.
- ☐ Provide supplemental forage.
- ☐ Soil moisture management.
- ☐ Reduce particulate emissions into the atmosphere.
- ☐ Provide improved wildlife habitat.
- ☐ Minimize and reduce soil compaction.

CRITERIA

This practice will be used on all lands requiring vegetative cover for natural resource protection, improvement, and other purposes stated above.

Plant species, seedbed preparation, seeding rates, seeding dates, seeding depths, fertility requirements, and planting methods will be consistent with approved local criteria and site conditions.

The species selected will be compatible with other components of the cropping system.

Cover crops will be terminated by harvest, frost, mowing, tillage, crimping, and/or herbicides in preparation for the following crop.

Herbicides used with cover crops will be compatible with the following crop.

Avoid using invasive species.

Cover crop residue will not be burned.

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CONSIDERATIONS

Plant cover crop in a timely matter to establish a good stand.

Maintain an actively growing cover crop as late as feasible to maximize plant growth, allowing time to prepare the field for the next crop. Use deep-rooted species to maximize nutrient recovery.

Avoid cover crop species that attract potentially damaging insects.

For most purposes for which cover crops are established, the combined canopy and surface cover is at nearly 90 percent or greater, and the above ground (dry weight) biomass production is at least 4,000 lbs/acre.

Cover crops may be used to improve site conditions for establishment of perennial species.

Consider using plant species that enhance biomass collection opportunities.

Use plant species that enhance forage opportunities for pollinators.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Plans and specifications will be prepared for the practice site. Plans for the establishment of cover crops shall include:

- Specie or species of plants to be established.
- Seeding rates.
- Recommended seeding dates.
- Establishment procedure.
- Planned rates and timing of nutrient application.
- Planned dates for destroying cover crop.
- Other information pertinent to establishing and managing the cover crop.

Plans and specifications for the establishment and management of cover crops may be recorded in narrative form, on job sheets, or on other forms.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Achieve vigorous growth of the cover crop to reduce competition from volunteer plants and shading.

Control weeds in cover crops by mowing or by using other pest management techniques.

Reset Form

COVER CROP PLANTING GUIDE

Cover Crop Species	Planting Rates	Planting Dates	BioMass Produced
		1. Coastal Plain 2. Piedmont 3. Mountains	(lbs./ac.) 6
Annual Lespedezas [1]	20-40 lbs.	1. February 1 – March 15 2. February 1 – April 1 3. March 15 – April 15	2,500
Austrian Winter Pea [4]	30-40 lbs.	1. August 25 – October 25 2. August 25 – October 15 3. N/A	4,000
Barley	2-3 bu.	1. September 1 – October 15 2. August 20 – October 10 3. August 01 – October 10	4,000
Crimson Clover [4]	15-30 lbs.	1. Sept. 15 – November 15 2. Sept. 5 – November 5 3. Sept. 1 – November 1	4,000
Hairy Vetch [5]	30-40 lbs.	1. August 25 – October 25 2. August 25 – October 15 3. July 15 – August 30	5,000
Oats	3 bu.	1. September 1 – October 15 2. August 20 – October 10 4. August 1 – November 1	4,500
Pearl Millet [3]	6-10 lbs. in row; 20-25 lbs. drilled or broadcast	1. May 5 – July 5 2. April 25 – June 30 3. April 15 – June 30	6,000
Rye	2 bu.	1. Sept. 15 – November 1 2. Sept. 5 – November 1 3. August 15 – November 1	7,500
Ryegrass [5]	30-40 lbs.	1. Sept. 15 – November 15 2. Sept. 15 – November 1 3. Sept. 1 – November 1	7,000
Sorghum-Sudan Hybrids [1, 2]	15-20 lbs. in row; 35-40 lbs. drilled or broadcast	1. May 5 – July 5 2. April 25 – June 30 3. April 15 – June 20	8,500
Triticale	1 ½ bu.	1. Sept. 15 – Nov. 30 2. Sept. 1 – Nov. 20 3. Aug. 20 – Oct. 20	6,000
Wheat	2-3 bu.	1. Oct. 25 – November 15 2. October 10 – November 1 3. October 1 – November 1	6,000

Other – such as summer cover or other species not listed--Contact the Conservation Agronomist for guidance.

[1] Tolerates fairly acid soil but performs best when a soil pH of 6.0 to 6.5 is maintained.

[2] Potential danger from prussic acid poison if plants are frosted, stunted or young growth is grazed. Do not allow horses to graze the green plants; apparently the hay may be used if properly cured.

[3] No problem with prussic acid.

[4] Inoculate seed.

[5] May at times become a pest since it volunteers readily. Herbicides can now be used effectively to reduce this problem.

[6] Mid range of production. Amounts will vary ± 50% depending on numerous factors. Top growth only.