United States Department of Agriculture

Conservation Practice Standard Overview

Cover Crop (340)

Cover crop is growing a crop of grass, small grain, or legumes primarily for seasonal protection and soil improvement.

Practice Information

Cover and green manure crops are grown on land where seasonal or long-term benefits of a cover crop are needed.

This practice is used to control erosion, add fertility and organic material to the soil, improve soil tilth, increase infiltration and aeration of the soil, and improve overall soil health. The practice is also used to increase populations of bees for pollination purposes. Cover and green manure crops have beneficial effects on water quantity and quality. Cover crops have a filtering effect on movement of sediment, pathogens, and dissolved and sediment-attached pollutants.

Operation and maintenance of cover crops include: controlling weeds by mowing or by using other pest management techniques, and managing for the efficient use of soil moisture by selecting water-efficient plant species and terminating the cover crop before excessive transpiration. Use of the cover crop as a green

manure crop to cycle nutrients will impact when to terminate the cover to match release of nutrient with uptake by following cash crop.

Common Associated Practices

Cover Crop (340) is commonly applied with practices such as Conservation Crop Rotation (328); Residue and Tillage Management, No Till (329); Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345); Nutrient Management (590), and Integrated Pest Management (595).

For further information, contact your local NRCS field office.