

Virginia NRCS Plant Establishment Guide (PEG), Section Ea (Cropland) **Rotation to Perennials Establishment Specifications (328)** October 2015

INTRODUCTION:

This document is part of the Virginia NRCS Plant Establishment Guide.

The purpose of this document is to provide establishment specifications for implementation of one of many planning alternatives under the Virginia NRCS 328 Conservation Crop Rotation Practice Standard.

ROTATION TO PERENNIALS IN VA-328:

Rotation to perennials is not required under the current VA-328 Conservation Crop Rotation Practice Standard, but it is a key alternative under that Standard.

The following are key quotes from VA-328 on the subject of rotation to perennials:

1. From “Conditions Where Practice Applies” (i.e., mandatory in all instances)

This practice applies to all cropland where at least one annually-planted crop is included in the crop rotation.

2. From “Conditions” (i.e., supplemental explanations / optional recommendations)

This Standard does not apply to land in permanent perennials. Nevertheless, including perennials in rotations is not only allowed under this Standard, but should be encouraged. Rotating annual crops with sod-forming perennials is a very effective way to achieve many purposes under this Standard.

This Standard does not apply to permanent pastureland. Controlled, limited grazing of annual and perennial crops and crop residues is allowed, however. Such grazing may help in diversifying the crop rotation and achieving many purposes under this Standard.

THREE OPTIONS FOR SPECIFICATIONS:

A very broad range of choices for harvested or unharvested perennial crops or combination of crops can potentially fit under the heading of rotation to perennials under VA-328. Use the following as a starting point for planning rotation to perennials.

Option 1: Selected Forage and Biomass Planting Recommendations from PEG Section Bb

Use establishment specifications for forage and biomass plantings (developed primarily for implementation of VA-512). Focus on perennials that establish relatively quickly (i.e., does not include warm-season perennial grasses).

Find lists and recommendations at:

http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/VA/Plant_Species_Mixes_10_30_2014.xlsx, under “Forage” tab.

Recommended species from this list are 104 (bluegrass), 107 (orchardgrass), 109 (perennial ryegrass), 112 (tall fescue), 113 (timothy). Recommended mixtures from this list are 114 (orchardgrass + alfalfa), 115 (orchardgrass + choice of legumes), 116 (orchardgrass & timothy + choice of legumes), 117 (tall fescue + choice of legumes). When using this option, take note of the limits on using certain species in certain regions of Virginia.

Option 2: Planting Recommendations for Biennial & Perennial Cover Crops from PEG Section Eb

Use establishment specifications for biennial & perennial cover crops (developed primarily for implementation of VA-340).

Find lists and recommendations at:

http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/VA/PEG_Eb_Cover_Crop_Establishment_Specifications.pdf, under “Seasonal Niche 6”.

Another option for finding the same information on biennial/perennial cover crops, with additional narrative guidance on planning and applying the recommendations, is the Virginia NRCS Cover Crop Planning Manual. This manual may be obtained from Section I of the eFOTG or from the following link:

http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/VA/VA_TN10_Agronomy.pdf

Option 3: Consult VA NRCS State Resource Conservationist (SRC) Section Staff

Rotation to perennials with strong soil conservation benefits can potentially include more innovative species, mixtures, and strategies than those recommended above. In such cases, consult SRC staff for additional guidance.