

Cover Crop Plus 2026-2027 Program

Application open June 22, 2026 - July 24, 2026 Funding for this pilot phase of the program is limited and applications will be selected on a first come first served basis.

Maryland farmers have long been leaders in cover cropping. The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) has supported Maryland Farmers in their cover cropping journeys through the Maryland Cover Crop Program. Widespread, long-term adoption by Maryland farmers has led to significant innovation in cover crop practice implementation as producers look towards more purposeful, specific cover cropping strategies to fit the unique needs of their soils and cropping systems. Maryland's innovative agricultural producers are increasingly interested in building soil health, reducing their dependence on commercial inputs, and maintaining soil moisture.

In order to support Maryland's innovative cover crop practitioners the Healthy Soils Program is excited to announce the pilot launch of our updated Cover Crop Plus program. Our goal is to deliver a streamlined, flexible program to serve agronomically sound, purposeful cover crop scenarios that are **not supported by the department's existing cover crop programs**.

Examples include:

- Summer cover crops - Following small grain or as part of summer field rest
 - Cover crop Mixes with less than 50% grass
 - Legumes for crop nitrogen - flowering before termination
 - Cover crops Planted into standing crops before August 1
 - Cover crops interseeded into wide crop rows
 - Early termination of grasses in a cover crop mix which includes legumes
 - Cover crops for grazing annuals - Adaptive/Rotational grazing required
- *Includes annuals planted into perennial pasture using no-till practices

Additionally, the program will consider proposed cover cropping scenarios not listed above with support from an approved Technical Service Provider (TSP) or supporting resource including:

- Extension Agent
- Agronomist
- Soil Conservation District Staff
- National Resource Conservation Service
- [Northeast Cover Crop Council Decision Tools](#)
- [Managing Cover Crops Profitably SARE publication](#)
- Supporting journal article, case study, or other agricultural publication

Program Eligibility and Requirements:

Applicants may enroll 10-500 acres. **Fields may not be enrolled in any other MDA cover crop program.** Applicants must submit:

- Completed application
- 3-year Management Plan - 2 of three years in scenarios not supported by other MDA cover crop programs.
- Field Maps
- Grazing Plan (if grazing cover crops)
- Supporting documents from Technical Service Provider or other approved resource (if proposing a TSP supported scenario)
- Current Nutrient Management Plan Certification Form

Planting and Termination:

Planting must occur prior to **November 5** unless part of an approved scenario supported by your Technical Service Provider.

Termination may not occur until after **April 15** unless summer planted, part of an approved scenario supported by your TSP, or cover crop biomass goal has been reached. If your cover crop mix contains legumes termination may not occur until **after flowering** unless part of an approved scenario supported by your TSP.

Seeding Rates and Mix Calculations must follow [NRCS Technical Guidelines](#) unless an alternative scenario supported by your Technical Service Provider or supporting resource is approved. For species and scenarios outside of the Technical Guide please consult with a TSP, [Northeast Cover Crop Council's Decision Tool](#) or the SARE publication [Managing Cover Crops Profitably](#).

*The nitrogen supplied by a legume only or legume dominant cover crop must be credited in the nutrient budget for the subsequent crop, in accordance with Maryland nutrient management regulations. Please contact your plan writer for more information.

Payment Rates - Payment Issues Following Spring Verification

Practice	Payment Rate/acre
Base	\$40.00
Diversity Bonus	\$15.00
Summer Bonus	\$15.00
Biomass Bonus	\$15.00
Nitrogen Reduction Bonus	\$15.00
Max	\$100.00

Bonus Payments:

- **Diversity Bonus** - Three or more species from three or more functional groups (Grass, Legume, Forb, Brassica) *If planting legumes for nitrogen two different legume species and one species from a different functional group is permitted.
- **Summer Bonus** - Cover crop planted after a small grain or after a fall/winter cover crop for field rest
- **Nitrogen Reduction Bonus** - Documented reduction of at least 15% commercial fertilizer application from past year baseline
- **Biomass Bonus** - Delay termination until after 2,000 pounds/acre biomass (measured as dry matter) is achieved

Reporting and Verification Requirements - General

- Applicants must complete all application materials and include required documentation
- Enrollees must notify the Department within **one week** of planting with updated establishment information.
- Enrollees must notify the Department **three weeks** before termination to schedule verification. **Payment will be issued after verification. Diversity and Biomass bonus will also be assessed at this time.**
- Enrollees must notify the Department within **one week** of termination with updated termination information.

Reporting and Verification Requirements - Biomass Bonus

- Dry matter biomass calculations may be completed by MDA, an approved Technical Service Provider, or by the enrollee following guidance from the Department or a

Technical Service Provider. **Payment will be made once biomass calculations are complete if the 2,000#/acre threshold is met.**

Reporting and Verification Requirements - Nitrogen Reduction Bonus

- Applicants must provide the department with the prior year's fertility application records.
- After crop harvest, enrollees must provide the department with current year's fertility application records for comparison. **Payment will be issued after comparison if rate reduction is met**