

Cover Crop/ Nutrient Management Ag BMP TAC Sub-committee Meeting

Monday September 23, 2024

Main Auditorium – Virginia Farm Bureau

12580 West Creek Parkway

Richmond, VA 23238

10:00am – 1:00pm

OPENING AND INTRODUCTION

Ms. Marie Schirmacher, DCR called the meeting to order at 10:04am and declared a quorum present. She reviewed the minutes from the August 26 meeting. The subcommittee motioned to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

ATTENDANCE

REVIEW OF REMAINING MATRIX ITEMS

The subcommittee reviewed the remaining matrix items and items needing more information deferred from the previous meeting (Attachment 1).

4C. Consider removing the 300-ac cap for acres receiving manure for the SL-8H practice.

Ms. Schirmacher reviewed previous communications with DCR for historical knowledge on the manure acreage cap. In 2019, the request was brought up to the subcommittee to eliminate all acreage caps in all specifications. DCR did not support this request and the acreage was to remain in the specifications. It was concluded the 300-acre cap was left out in the Whole Farm Approach (WFA) due to an oversight. The subcommittee motioned to maintain the 300-acre cap for acres receiving manure and keep the requirement consistent between VACS and WFA. The motion passed 11 to 1.

5C. Expand the number of cover crop plans included in the Virginia Ag BMPs based on the SARE Manual.

Ms. Schirmacher shared a summary of the presentation and information she received from Dr. Hunter Frame. The presentation did not discuss the crops listed in the matrix item, only cereal rye, legumes, and rye legume mixture. Dr. Frame said he is looking at previous years' data, such as performance and bloom date, but will not have anything published until at least next year. The subcommittee motioned to defer item 5C until the CY25 TAC cycle in order to have published data and more information. The motioned passed unanimously 12 to 0.

7C. Clarify in the cover crop specification that only the application of N and P are restricted.

Ms. Schirmacher presented information received from the Chesapeake Bay Program cover crop expert panel reports that application, timing, and placement of potassium and other micronutrients are not water quality impairments as it relates to the WIP and Chesapeake Bay Program. The only nutrients that

are targeted in the Chesapeake Bay Program are nitrogen and phosphorus, so it is acceptable to add clarifying language to the applicable cover crop specifications that states, “No nitrogen or phosphorus from any sources are allowed between the harvesting of the previous crop and March 1 of the next calendar year. No nitrogen or phosphorus is allowed at planting.” The subcommittee motioned to update applicable cover crop specifications to include this language. ***The motion passed unanimously 12 to 0 to advance to the full TAC.***

Ms. Schirmacher reviewed the entire matrix with the subcommittee to ensure all items have been addressed. The matrix will be sent out to members with comments prior to the full TAC meeting at the end of October.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

Ms. Schirmacher reminded the committee the full TAC will be meeting on October 29. The location is TBD.

ADJOURNMENT

With all business completed, the subcommittee motioned to adjourn at 10:44am. The motion passed unanimously.

Attachment 1

MATRIX OF ADVANCED COVER CROP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2024 (CY24) TAC					
Item #	Ag. BMP	Suggestion to the TAC	TAC Recommendations	DCR Supports	FY2026/2027
7C		Clarify in the cover crop specification that only the application of N and P are restricted. Allowing the application of potassium and other micro-nutrients that are not water quality impairments should be acceptable.	Motioned to forward with additional language across specifications as applicable (SL-8, SL-8A, SL-8B, SL-8H, SL-8M, WQ-4, WFA-CC), that only restricts nitrogen and phosphorus nutrient applications within the cover cropping period.		

MATRIX OF DEFERRED COVER CROP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Item #	Ag. BMP	Suggestion to the TAC	Reason for Deferring
1C		<p>Change the 60% stand date from Dec. 15 to Jan. 1.</p> <p>For all VACS cover crop practices: Due to the change in planting dates in recent years, we recommend adjusting the date producers must achieve a good stand and good growth of vegetative winter cover, by a minimum of 2 weeks, to match the adjustment made to the cover crop planting dates. It was the recommendation of Frank Long, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent, to extend the date as far out as February or March to be comparable to our partner agency’s cover crop standards. The meeting attendees discussed the likelihood of such a radical change being made, which is why we are making the suggestion to correlate to the planting date change, as a minimum. This will allow the producers planting cover crops up to the November 30th planting deadline sufficient time to achieve a good stand and good growth to meet the 60% coverage requirement. The specification could read: “A good stand and good growth of vegetative winter cover must be obtained by December 31 to protect the area from nutrient leaching and runoff in the fall and winter. All cover crop plantings must maintain a minimum of 60% cover crop plant material on the enrolled acres through the lifespan of the practice.”</p>	<p>Item was deferred due to previous research done by Virginia Tech regarding frost dates by region. Additionally, the subcommittee would like to review if changing stand dates impacts credit received for cover crops.</p>
5C		<p>The current Agricultural Best Management Practices (BMP) includes several important practices for the use of cover crops. The types of cover crop plants are largely based on grains, some legumes, and some brassicas. There is room for improvement. The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) organization also recommends the use of cover crops, but their recommended list of plants is more extensive than the current Ag BMPs. The enclosed table shows the differences. Also, under SARE’s manual the use of the cover crops is more diverse. The increased plant diversity has several advantages to soil enrichment. A richer diversity of a mix of cover plants reportedly can produce better soil organic matter and deeper root structures. Expand the number of cover crop plans included in the Virginia Ag BMPs based on the SARE manual.</p>	<p>Deferred to next TAC cycle given Virginia Tech is planning to publish more data pertinent to the cover crops listed in SARE Manual.</p>

MATRIX OF TABLED COVER CROP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Item #	Ag. BMP	Suggestion to the TAC	Reason for Tabling
2C		Revise cover crop rates to incentivize mixed species over pure rye. Research shows early planted mix of brassica and rye takes up more nitrogen than rye alone https://access.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1002/jeq2.20342	The subcommittee tabled the item as rye receives more credit than mixed species in the Bay Model.
3C	WQ-4	Consider increasing the payment rate for the WQ-4 practice. Other cover crop practice rates have recently been increased and it would be appropriate to increase this practice's rate as well.	Item was tabled as legumes do not receive much credit in the Model.
4C	SL-8H	Consider removing the 300 acre cap for acres receiving manure for the SL-8H practice.	Item was tabled since credit is not received. The cap will be consistent between VACS and WFA.
6C	SL-8H	Incentivize Rye and Triticale under the SL-8H the same way they are under the SL-8B. Many producers who plant rye and triticale for harvest are utilizing the crop as on-farm feed and then spreading on-farm generated manure back on the fields ahead of the cash crops.	Item was tabled as harvestable acres receive lower rate of credit and producers are saving costs through this practice.
8C	NM-5P	<p align="center">Revise/clarify the CC/NM subcommittee's recommended from 2023 to add cost share for precision soil sampling to the NM-5P. <i>[Deferred in 2023]</i></p> <p align="center">NM-5P: C. Rates</p> <p>2. No per sample cost-share is available for zone/grid (subfield) soil fertility testing. Costs associated with zone or grid (subfield) soil sampling and analysis by a commercial laboratory that are used to implement this practice will be reimbursed at a flat rate of \$6.00 per acre. New soil sample commercial laboratory results (within the program year the payment is being made) must be provided for reimbursement.</p>	Tabled; there is no difference in credit for various sampling practices.
9C	SL-8A	Adjust SL-8A - add language for summer cover following a small grain cash crop, late harvest, etc., in addition to the current language. Raise rates by \$20 for each payment rate to encourage cover.	The subcommittee motioned to table this item as there is no credit received under SL-8A.
10C		Change the early planting date for CC to Nov. 1 and the standard date to Nov. 20 for both the Coastal Plain and Piedmont areas.	Tabled; VT has presented GDD and average frost dates in research for each region.
11C		Request that a legume mixed with a cereal grain be able to receive a planting bonus similar to the rye planting bonus.	Tabled; this item is more focused as a soil health initiative than a water quality improvement practice.