

AGENDA

TAC Cover Crop & Nutrient Management Subcommittee – 1st Meeting

October 2, 2026

Auditorium, Central High School Educational Complex

2748 Dogtown Road, Goochland, VA 23063 – (804) 556-4936

10:00 a.m. – Welcome, introductions, declaration of a quorum, assign note taker, review agenda, and discuss the prioritization

1. Review of TAC Ground Rules and General Decorum

- ADVANCE – To officially adopt a recommendation to the TAC as it was submitted and send it to the SWCB.
- AMEND – To officially adopt language based upon, yet not identical to, a recommendation to the TAC, and send it to the SWCB.
- TABLE – To officially suspend consideration of a recommendation to the TAC. Note: Tabled items will not be brought back to the TAC for at least three years.
- DEFER – To officially postpone consideration of a recommendation to the TAC. Deferred items will be reconsidered in a future TAC year.

2. New Business

- Review Matrix and prepare plans to address items.
- Discussion and possible action on the following specifications under review this cycle for use and effectiveness:
 - CCI-RT – Long Term Continuous Reduced Tillage Planting System
 - NM-7 – Cover Crop for Managing Liquid or Semi-Solid Manure
 - SL-15B – Continuous No-Till Forage Production System
 - SL-3 – Stripcropping System
 - SL-3B – Buffer Stripcropping
 - SL-8M – Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management with Fall Manure
 - WQ-10 – Integrated Pest Management
 - WQ-7 – Irrigation Water Recycling System
- Discussion and possible action on Matrix Items 1C through 18C, as prioritization and time allow.

3. Public Comment (NOTE: Per TAC Ground Rules and Procedures, anyone attending the meeting who is NOT a member of the subcommittee or an invited guest is considered a member of the public and must reserve their comments until the public comment period)

4. Review of the Day's Discussion/Outcomes/Actions

- Finalize notes of discussion and actions for meeting minutes.
- Final check of matrix items.

5. Adjourn: No Later Than 3:00 p.m.

MATRIX OF ADVANCED COVER CROP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2026 (CY26) TAC

Item #	Ag. BMP	Suggestion to the TAC	TAC Recommendations	DCR Supports	FY2028/2029
		Complete review of practices for use and effectiveness, per TAC rules (list of practices provided).			
1C		Offer an incentive to non-chemical kill downs such as crimping in our cover crop programs. Better for the soil, water, crops, etc. The equipment cost is another investment for the producer, and the incentive might defray that cost for more utilization of this method.			
2C		A Summer soil building cover crop practice to include planting summer annuals in Spring or early Summer, letting them grow all Summer, and leaving all the residue on the field. This would give producers an option for rejuvenating fields over the summer. When crop prices are thin some producers will not plant certain fields or less productive farms altogether. In these circumstances the producer could take advantage of the open summer season and plant a soil building cover crop to improve the soil for the following year.			
3C		Incentivize legumes commensurate with their expense, at an inadequate minimum. I recommend that the cost-share cover more than the expense, acting as an incentive to move conventional farmers toward more productive practices. Note that we are a water quality program, yes? As discussed, healthy soil is healthy water. And a diversity of the right mix of roots = healthy soil.			
4C		Cost-share long-lasting soil-remediation amendments like PFAS-free biochar (see supporting documentation)			
5C		Consider a practice for planting native/pollinator plants on agricultural land consistent with NRCS Practice Code and Standard 327. These plantings may be done on cropland being converted perennial native plants that would address soil, water, and wildlife habitat degradation resource concerns to meet landowner objectives. <i>Deferred in CY25 pending creation of a draft specification</i>			
6C		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			

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		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. <i>Deferred in CY24 and 25 pending publication of data from VT.</i>			
7C		Add NM-7 (Cover Crop for Managing Liquid and Semi-Solid Manure) as an eligible practice in WFA. It is not fair for producers to miss a core payment for these acres and it is an inefficient use of SWCD staff time to have to manage a separate application for these acres.			
8C		<i>Two suggestions related to cover crop seeding rates:</i> a. For consistency, suggest edits to the Cover Crop species and rates tables related to rye species and seeding rates for all species be made consistently across all cover crop practices. There is no reason to have different seeding rates for various cover crop practices. We suggest using the same table for all practices. We suggest reviewing tables in all of the Cover Crop specifications. While not all of the Cover Crop practices offer bonus payments for Rye, it is important that the information in the tables be consistent across all related practice specifications. Currently Barley seeding rate is not consistent across all practices. There may be others that are not consistent as well. b. Reevaluate seeding rates for each planting method for all cover crop practices and ensure that the appropriate rates are being used for cover crop practices statewide. Create a required protocol to ensure existing or revised seeding rates are being used for cover crop practices.			
9C		Change the date listed on page 15 of the WFA-NM specification, Policies and Specifications section #8 from April 1st to May 1st to align with other specifications that were changed.			
10C		Consider revising the CCI-SL-1 specification to remove the requirement that the field be previously be enrolled in the SL-1 practice. There are ways to verify cropping and conversion history other than relying on SWCD practice participation			

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		records. We are potentially missing out on creditable acres by excluding acres that were not part of an SL-1 practice. Also, this concern was also brought up and discussed during the full TAC meeting in October.			
11C		Recommend revising the cost share bonus payment to promote the use of Virginia grown seed. The recent data from Dr. Hunter Frame indicates there is no difference in cereal grain species in biomass and N uptake. Therefore, the incentive should be placed to increase the use of Virginia Certified/Quality Assurance (QATM), and Virginia grown seed. Virginia's small grain sector has also faced a notable decline over the past decade driven largely by a low market price. Expanding in-state seed production presents an opportunity to rebuild this market by strengthening demand and keeping more value within Virginia's agricultural economy. By incentivizing Virginia-grown seed, the program can help stabilize acreage, support local seed suppliers, and encourage a reintegration of small grains into the rotation of producers across the state.			
12C		Request that the WFANM practices be reviewed by both the Nutrient Management/Cover Crop and Programmatic Subcommittees. Our goal is to establish a clear, standardized definition of "acceptable documentation and written verification" for each practice. Currently, the specifications contain inconsistencies regarding the data required from producers. Some suggested verification examples are either irrelevant to the specific practice or lack the necessary geographic data to link the information to a specific location. Ideally, we should develop a list of relevant documentation that moves away from a reliance on invoices or bills.			
13C		Request that the NM-1A practice be reviewed by the Nutrient Management/Cover Crop and Programmatic Subcommittees. Specifically, we suggest a review of the specification language requiring an invoice from the private certified planner. We recommend removing this requirement, as the District does not pay the invoice amount set by the plan writer. Instead, payment is based strictly on the signed-up acreage, verified by FSA maps and producer confirmation of the relevant Farm, Tract, and Fields.			

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14C		Consider incentivizing mixes in cover crop practices over single species small grain planting. It seems planting species that compliment each other would provide more water quality benefit than a single cover crop species.			
15C		Consider the option of a cover crop that is harvested but is allowed to regrow and then killed down. It seems this would provide close to the same benefits associated with deep roots and high residue that a cover crop that is killed and not harvested would provide.			
16C		Additional \$ per acre on cover crops if small grain is drilled vs broadcast (better root development)			
17C		Small amount of N at CC planting - cover crops need to be treated like a cash crop and are a great tool for scavenging leftover nutrients not used by the previous crop. This will allow the plant to germinate and set roots faster, which in turn will help in nutrient scavenging and also taking of plant food that was unavailable and making it plant available. This will also build biomass which can lead to a pay for performance scenario			
18C		CCI-CNT interpretation regarding vertical tillage - should not be restricted from cost share because they own a piece of vertical tillage equipment, vertical tillage equipment is eligible for a conservation tillage tax credit so why are some folks being punished			

MATRIX OF DEFERRED COVER CROP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS			
Item #	Ag. BMP	Suggestion to the TAC	Reason for Deferring

MATRIX OF TABLED COVER CROP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS			
Item #	Ag. BMP	Suggestion to the TAC	Reason for Tabling

COVER CROP NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR USE AND EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW						
Practice Implementation 2015-2026						
Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
CCI-RT	Long Term Continuous Reduced Tillage Planting Systems	2026	1	1	\$ 498.00	-
		Total	1	1	\$ 498.00	-
Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
NM-7	Cover Crop for Managing Liquid or Semi-Solid Manure	2021	1	1	\$ 950.00	-
NM-7	Cover Crop for Managing Liquid or Semi-Solid Manure	2022	18	2	\$ 23,593.50	-
NM-7	Cover Crop for Managing Liquid or Semi-Solid Manure	2024	3	1	\$ 1,703.10	-
NM-7	Cover Crop for Managing Liquid or Semi-Solid Manure	2025	4	1	\$ 3,578.75	-
NM-7	Cover Crop for Managing Liquid or Semi-Solid Manure	2026	1	1	\$ 707.00	-
		Total	27	2	\$ 30,532.35	-
Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
SL-15B	Continuous No-Till Forage Production System	2021	4	1	\$ 1,324.75	-
SL-15B	Continuous No-Till Forage Production System	2023	5	1	\$ 50,540.00	-
SL-15B	Continuous No-Till Forage Production System	2025	43	2	\$ 51,768.50	-
SL-15B	Continuous No-Till Forage Production System	2026	37	1	\$ 30,560.60	-
		Total	89	4	\$ 134,193.85	-
Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
SL-3	Stripcropping systems	2015	1	1	\$ 872.40	-
		Total	1	1	\$ 872.40	-
Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
SL-3B	Buffer Stripcropping	-	0	0	-	-
		Total	0	0	-	-

Virginia Agricultural BMP Technical Advisory Committee Scope of Work: August through December 2026

Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
SL-8M	Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management with Fall Manure Application	2023	25	3	\$ 36,043.52	-
SL-8M	Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management with Fall Manure Application	2024	20	3	\$ 34,408.09	-
SL-8M	Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management with Fall Manure Application	2025	19	5	\$ 70,087.10	-
SL-8M	Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management with Fall Manure Application	2026	16	4	\$ 42,122.05	-
		Total	80	6	\$ 182,660.76	-
Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
WQ-10	Integrated Pest Management	2015	1	1	-	\$ 10,625.00
		Total	1	1	-	\$ 10,625.00
Practice Code	Practice Name	Program Year	Instances Completed	Districts Implemented	Cost-Share Provided	Tax Credit Provided
WQ-7	Irrigation Water Recycling System	-	0	0	-	-
		Total	0	0	-	-

Urgent TAC Committee Feedback : Drought Conditions & Biochar

I have more feedback as I witness what's occurring with farmers and this terrible season of 'rain' we've had here in Virginia.

What farmers paying close attention to soil health know is that healthy soil acts as a backup watering system in drought conditions. What farmers who don't consider themselves 'soil farmers' don't know, is that healthy soil acts as that backup.

This means I have folks out here right now, hay farmers are in particular coming to mind, with their stand at mid-calf when it should be knee-high.

And fertilizers are short-term steroids, but not long-term solutions. No matter the fertilizer, when the rain doesn't fall and the underlying inadequacies of the soil are laid bare—growth stalls, or worse.

As with all of my suggestions to you to date, we have to work upstream. We need to cost-share long-lasting soil-remediation amendments like PFAS-free biochar ([here's a VA org](#) doing incredible work).

In fact, on my 40 acres we're getting ready to spread biochar because my land has been conventionally farmed for decades and the soil is in bad shape. We're applying small amounts of biochar across 8 acres for \$700. That's less than \$100 per acre for a slow-release soil conditioner and rehabilitator. If my math is mathing, standard conventional fertilizer costs \$170-\$200 per acre. What if biochar could cut that need in half, or more? How? Great question. Below are the benefits of biochar:

*******Enhanced Water Retention:** The highly porous structure of biochar holds water within the soil, significantly increasing moisture retention. This makes soil more drought-resistant, allowing plants to survive longer with less irrigation.

Increased Nutrient Retention: Biochar acts as a "fertilizer sink" or sponge, retaining essential nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen, preventing them from leaching into groundwater. This retention boosts fertilizer efficiency and keeps nutrients available for plant uptake.

Improved Soil Microbial Activity: The surface area of biochar provides a perfect habitat for beneficial bacteria and fungi, fostering a healthy ecosystem within the soil. This increased microbial activity promotes better plant growth and root development.

Optimal Soil Structure and Aeration: Biochar improves soil aeration and reduces compaction, creating a better environment for plant roots to grow. It aids in building soil structure, allowing for better drainage in heavy soils and better moisture retention in sandy soils.

Carbon Sequestration (Climate Mitigation): Biochar locks carbon into the soil for hundreds, even thousands of years, preventing it from being released into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. This process turns agricultural waste into a valuable carbon sink.

Cover Crop Plant Comparison

Plan Options under Current VA Ag BMP	SARE Cover Crop Plant Options
Tetraploid Rye (pure strain only)	Rye
Winter Rye	Winter rye
Winter Barley	Barley
Winter Annual Ryegrass	Annual ryegrass
Winter Wheat	Wheat
Winter Hardy Oats	Oats
Small Grain Mixtures	Cover Crop Mixtures
Small Grain Mixtures with a) legume†	Cover Crop Mixtures
Small Grain Mixtures with b) forage radish	Cover Crop Mixtures
Small Grain Mixtures with c) canola or rape	Cover Crop Mixtures
Triticale	Triticale
Forage Radish	Oilseed (forage) radish
Forage Radish 1) mixture with grass or legume†	Cover Crop Mixtures
Winter-hardy Brassica (canola/rape)	Rapeseed
Winter-hardy Brassica (canola/rape) and 1) mixture with grass or legume†	Brassicas
Crimson Clover	Crimson clover
Austrian Winter Pea	
Hairy Vetch	Hairy Vetch
	Field peas
	Subterranean clover
	Balansa clover
	Berseem clover
	Cowpeas
	Sunn hemp
	Velvet beans
	Lablab beans
	Pigeon peas
	Red clover
	Sweet clover
	White clover
	Sudangrass and sorghum-sudan hybrids
	Millets
	Buckwheat
	Cover Crop Mixtures

† - legume = Crimson Clover, Austrian Winter Pea, or Hairy Vetch