COVER CROPS
-In the PY22 VACS Program-

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Objectives

• Intro to Key VACS Cover Crop Options
• Focus on SL-8B
  – Description and Purpose
  – Important Considerations
  – Planting Dates
  – Cover Requirements
  – VACS Sign-Ups
  – District Board Options for CC Planting Dates
Intro to Key VACS Cover Crops Options
Key VACS Cover Crop Options

• **SL-8B** Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management (i.e. the “go to” option)
• **WQ-4** Legume Based Cover Crop
• **SL-8H** Harvestable Cover Crop
• **SL-8** Protective Cover for Specialty Crops
• **SL-8A** Protective Cover for Agricultural Cropland (i.e. the “catch all” CC option)
Key CC Practice Commonalities

• SL-8, SL-8B, SL-8H and WQ-4 are all commonly used to establish vegetative cover on cropland to reduce erosion and loss of nutrients

• Annual practices; can sign up every year

• Participants can elect for cost-share or tax credit, but not both

• Most seed types, rates and planting dates prescribed

• NMP Required

• No nutrients allowed at planting!

• Require multiple field checks (cover check & end of season)
WQ-4 Legume Based Cover Crop

- Used as a natural source of nitrogen to reduce applied soil amendments
- $30 per acre flat rate payment OR tax credit only
- Grazing and removal of residue are not permitted; cover crop must be left on surface, intact and unincorporated, to serve as mulch for no-till planting of commercial crops (at which point practice can be certified)

Credi: today.oregonstate.edu
Key VACS Cover Crop Options

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SL-8H Harvestable Cover Crop

• The Commonwealth’s harvestable option
• 60% cover must be maintained
• Harvesting for hay, haylage, silage, grain, straw or seed is permitted after March 14
• Crop may be incorporated or left unincorporated on the field
• Manure can be used on up to 300 acres but must meet conditions listed in the Manual
• $20 per acre flat rate payment OR tax credit only
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SL-8 Protective Cover for Specialty Crops

- For vegetables, tobacco and small grains
- Seeding must be planted and certified by November 30
- Must be in the ground 90 days after certification
- May be incorporated or left unincorporated on the field
- Flat rate per acre payment of $30 per acre OR tax credit
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• **SL-8A** Protective Cover for Agricultural Cropland (i.e. the “catch all” CC option)
SL-8A Protective Cover for Agricultural Cropland – NEW!!!

• A variety of unusual situations created the need for a “catch-all” cover crop specification in order to reduce wind and water erosion and improve water quality.

• Originally the TAC was going to edit SL-8, but in the end decided to add a completely different specification to the Manual.

• THIS SPEC PROVIDES A GREAT OPPORTUNITY!
SL-8A Protective Cover for Agricultural Cropland

• SL-8A incentivizes producers to keep cover on cropland when not in use.

• More specifically, SL-8A would be applicable for the following situations:
  – After a crop failure
  – After floods, hail, tornado or hurricane damage
  – Other unforeseen circumstances
  – Summer cover crops
SL-8A for Summer Cover

Credit: farmingsweetbay.wordpress.com
SL-8A Protective Cover for Agricultural Cropland

- Note that there are separate species lists designated for spring, summer and fall plantings
- Seed must be planted and certified within 45 days after crop harvest or destruction
- All seeding must be planted and certified no earlier than March 1 or no later than November 15
- 60% cover must be maintained for at least 60 days or until the conservation purpose is served, whichever is greater
- The cover shall be left on the land unincorporated or incorporated according to the participant’s choice
SL-8A Protective Cover for Agricultural Cropland

- Rates:
  - Payment provided in a variable rate structure based on the number of days the cover crop must be maintained on the ground after achieving 60% cover:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Days Maintained</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60-89 Days</td>
<td>$15.00/Acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-119 Days</td>
<td>$20.00/Acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120+ Days</td>
<td>$25.00/Acre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Quick Note: NM-7 Cover Crop for Managing Liquid or Semi-Solid Manure

- Highly complex spec which uses a cover crop as part of an intense nutrient management program
- Created to help liquid/semi-solid manure generating operations improve nitrogen and phosphorus management through applications to actively growing crops; definitely a niche practice!
- Does not apply to farms that import manure

Credit: cdrf.org
SL-8B Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management & Residue Management – the “Go To” Option

- The Commonwealth’s “premier” or “go to” option for serving farmers by the implementation of cover crops
- Designed to establish vegetative cover on cropland, reduce erosion and nutrient losses, as well as utilize the maximum amount of residual nitrogen from previous applications in the first three feet of the soil profile
SL-8B Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management & Residue Management – the “Go To” Option

• The key cover crop for Bay Model credit
• Intended primarily as a fall/winter cover crop, SL-8B is usually planted following the harvest of corn (but not required)
• Intended to parallel and be subject to NRCS Standard 340
SL-8B Soil Loss Requirements

• RUSLE2 soil loss calculations are required to be run and documented and included in the participant’s case file
• Note: As a long-term project, DCR is looking to find a way to run the universal soil loss equation in Tracking

Credit: blog.ucsusa.org
SL-8B Nutrient Requirements

- **No nutrients allowed** between harvest of previous crop and March 1 of the following year
- Producers must be fully implementing a current Nutrient Management Plan on all acreage within the field that this practice will be implemented on.
SL-8B Species Options

Select one of the following species and/or mixtures of species to plant in all soils:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>bu./acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rye (Tetraploid)</td>
<td>2 bu./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Rye (not tetraploid)</td>
<td>2 bu./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Barley</td>
<td>2 bu./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Hardy Oats</td>
<td>2 bu./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Wheat or Triticale</td>
<td>2 bu./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Annual ryegrass</td>
<td>20 lbs./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small grain mixtures with</td>
<td>1 bu./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) legume† or</td>
<td>10 lbs./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Diakon (forage or tillage) Radish or</td>
<td>6 lb./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) canola or rape</td>
<td>4 lbs./acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diakon (forage or tillage) Radish mixture with annual ryegrass</td>
<td>6-8 lbs./acre(^\circ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter-hardy <em>Brassica</em> (canola/rape) mixture with annual ryegrass</td>
<td>5 - 7 lbs./acre(^\circ)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† - legume = Crimson Clover, Austrian Winter Pea or Hairy Vetch
\(^\circ\) - Use higher seeding rates for pure stands and lower seeding rates for mixed species plantings

Higher seeding rates are recommended for aerial seeding and non-incorporation seeding methods.

Note: No specific seeding depth mentioned in VACS specs. However, Seed-to-Soil Contact is a critical concept when working with Participants!
SL-8B Approved Rye Options (as of PY22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6250 Abruzzi</th>
<th>Paster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abruzzi</td>
<td>Ryman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dura</td>
<td>Virginia Abruzzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Grazer</td>
<td>Wheeler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elbon</td>
<td>Wintergrazer 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazer</td>
<td>Winterking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graze Master</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OR… any other indeterminate growth tetraploid rye cultivar.

Interested in a new cultivar to add to the list? Send it to the TAC!
SL-8B Planting Dates (as of PY22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Early Planting Date</th>
<th>Standard Planting Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cities of Chesapeake &amp; VA Beach</td>
<td>November 10</td>
<td>November 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Plain (including the Eastern Shore)</td>
<td>November 10</td>
<td>November 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>October 25</td>
<td>November 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain and Valley</td>
<td>October 20</td>
<td>November 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The planting dates above are the NEW planting dates beginning in PY22. Most have been extended by two weeks due to climatic trends and the fact that corn is staying in the field longer.
SL-8B – Cover Requirements

- 60% cover must be obtained by December 15th (new in PY22)
- Cover must be checked by the District
- 60% cover required to be maintained through March 14
- Pasturing is permitted as long as 60% cover is maintained through March 14.
SL-8B – Termination

- Harvesting for hay, haylage, silage, grain, straw or seed is not permitted in any situation.
- If producers anticipate a need for additional harvest, they should be applying for SL-8H instead.
- Crop must be terminated by grazing, mechanical or chemical means no earlier than March 15 and no later than June 1.
- May be incorporated or left unincorporated on the field.
SL-8B – Payment Options

• Flat rate per acre payment OR tax credit only; not both.
• Tiered system based upon what is planted and when:
  – $20 per acre (i.e. base rate)
  – $30 per acre early planting bonus
  – $10 per acre bonus for planting rye from the cultivars listed in the Manual
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Taking Sign-Ups

• Districts may take continuous sign-up or have an advertised sign-up period
• Participants must meet VACS eligibility requirements (i.e. 3 years of ag production on 5+ contiguous acres with $1K+ verifiable ag income)
• District must receive Contract Part I and W-9 tax form with matching information
Board Responsibilities

- District Technical Committees should review all cover crop applications received and rank them according to Priority and Secondary Considerations
- District Boards must formally approve cover crop contracts
- District staff should send participants an approval letter clearly listing which fields have been approved
Other Key CC Program Considerations

• BMPs initiated prior to submitting an application are not eligible.

• If a participant submits an application and proceeds with a cover crop practice even if they are not yet formally approved, that is okay.

• As long as the participant follows the specification and the District checks for 60% cover, the District may approve funding later in the year if it becomes available.

• Districts should have a plan for dealing with cancellations
So What About the Weather?
Extreme Act of Nature (EAN) for SL-8B Only

- District Board of Directors (BOD) may authorize a one-time per planting season extension of 14 days beyond the standard planting dates cited within the practice specifications.
- When the standard planting dates are extended, so too are the corresponding performance criteria.
- Once planted, those cover crops must satisfy the required performance criteria included in the practice specification (e.g. 60% cover)
Extreme Act of Nature (EAN) for SL-8B Only

- BOD actions for extension must have supporting EAN documentation.
- The following two options allow the BOD to approve an extension for an entire county, city, or multiple jurisdictions. These documents are:
  - Documentation of the Governor’s request for a disaster designation
  - Documentation of a Farm Service Agency (FSA) disaster declaration
- In either case, the disaster declaration must directly impact the germination or growth of cover crops in the counties or cities included in the designation.
EAN for SL-8B Only continued

• If there is no disaster declaration, the BOD may extend planting and performance criteria dates at a hydrologic unit code (HUC) level. To do so, the BOD must have both:

  – Documentation from a local credible source such as the local Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent or AREC which clearly references the unusual EAN circumstances and their impact to the HUC(s) in question

  – Documentation from a professionally recognized climatology expert which clearly references the unusual EAN circumstance in the HUCs being considered for an extension (e.g. State Climatology Office, United States Drought Monitor, Palmer Drought Severity Index)
As stated before, the BOD may grant an EAN for one or more HUCs within their District boundaries that applies to all SL-8B practices that are wholly within those HUCs.

Farmers need not formally apply; records should be kept for all impacted case files.

All farmers should be reminded that the performance criteria will also be pushed back by 14 days, but the 60% cover metric still must be met in order for the farmer to be paid.

The Ag Incentives Program Manager must be notified.
EAN for other Cover Crop Practices

• Includes SL-8H, NM-7, and WQ-4
• The Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) in consultation with the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Board (VSWCB) may authorize District Boards to provide an extension for certain planting dates of up to 14 days beyond the planting date.
• Practices must satisfy required criteria included in practice spec.
QUESTIONS?

Credit: Tri-County/City SWCD