

Cover Crops and Federal Crop Insurance



Cover Crops and Good Farming Practices

For cash crops following cover crops, Risk Management Agency (RMA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) organized an interagency workgroup to develop a consistent cover crop policy across the three agencies. The interagency group developed the NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines (Guidelines), with the guiding principle that cover crops maximize conservation benefits and increase management flexibility, while minimizing yield reduction risk in the insured crop. In accordance with the 2018 Farm Bill, for crops planted in the 2020 crop year and later, insurance attaches at time of planting the insured crop and any concerns regarding cover crop management practices will be applicable to RMA Good Farming Practice (GFP) determinations. This is consistent with all other production management decisions (e.g. fertilizer application, seeding rates, tillage practices etc.).

Overview

Cover Crops and Federal Crop Insurance

Cover crops and crop insurance have successfully coexisted, as evidenced by the rapid growth in the use of this agronomic practice. As you continue exploring the use of this conservation practice by planting the cover crop it is important that you review your crop insurance policy for more information regarding cover crops, insurability, and good farming practices.

Defining a Cover Crop

For crop insurance purposes, a cover crop is a crop generally recognized by agricultural experts as agronomically sound in the area for erosion control or other purposes for conservation or soil improvement. If you plant cover crops you may improve:

- Water use efficiency and quality improvements
- Erosion Control
- Soil health improvement and nutrient cycling
- Weed and pest control
- Allelopathy
- Habitat for beneficial organisms

Terminating a Cover Crop

Cover Crop Termination means a practice that historically and under reasonable circumstances results in the termination of the growth of a cover crop.

Additional Guidelines and Flexibility

The purpose of the Guidelines is to provide an additional level of comfort for producers that may be unfamiliar with cover crops or are implementing innovative cover cropping systems and want up front assurance that the crop is insured and cover cropping management decisions will be considered a GFP. These Guidelines serve as a recognized nationally applicable agricultural expert resource for cover crop termination in cover cropping management systems. To help maximize additional flexibility and up-front assurance, you can choose to pursue any one of the following options to assure that your cover cropping management system is a GFP.

1. Follow the generalized zonal guidance provided in the Guidelines,
2. Utilize already available published materials from agricultural experts (e.g., from a university) that are applicable for the crop and the area that support the cover crop management practice as a GFP determination (per the GFP Handbook), or
3. In rare instance where 1 and 2 do not cover a specific cover cropping management system, request an exception to these Guidelines by receiving agricultural expert support in writing in accordance with the GFP Handbook.

The Guidelines provide resources and options for you if you prefer up front assurance, but it is not required to obtain insurance. If you choose not to follow the Guidelines or do not obtain other agricultural expert material, insurance still attaches as per the changes in the 2018 Farm Bill.

In the event of a claim that is questioned by an Approved Insurance Provider (AIP) on the grounds of cover crop management, the AIP will complete research to adhere to procedure in order to make an initial GFP decision. For additional details regarding good farming practice determinations please see the RMA Good Farming Practice Handbook.

Planting a Cover Crop Into an Insured Crop

Once the cash crop is planted, insurance attaches. You must continue to follow all other crop provisions for that crop to remain insurable. If the acreage has been interplanted, which is two or more crops planted in a manner that does not permit separate agronomic maintenance or harvest of the insured crop, the cash crop is not insurable.



On the other hand, if two or more crops are planted in a manner that does permit separate agronomic maintenance or harvest of the insured crop, then the crop is insurable. An example of this may be aerial seeding cover crop seeds into a corn crop. In this case, any damage to the insured corn crop caused by the cover crop would not be covered and uninsured cause of loss appraisals would be applied to the insured crop when determining any indemnity payment.

Planting a Cover Crop After an Insured Crop is Harvested

You must also be aware of crop insurance provisions concerning cover crops planted after an insured crop. A cover crop, planted after a first insured crop and planted for the purpose harvest for grain or seed is considered to be a second crop. A cover crop that is covered by FSA's Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) or receives other USDA benefits associated with forage crops will also be considered as planted for the purpose of haying, grazing or otherwise harvesting. A cover crop meeting these conditions will be considered a second crop, and all first insured crop / second crop rules and procedures will apply.

Types of Cover Crops

RMA does not have an approved list of cover crops. You should consult agricultural experts for which cover crops are agronomically sound for the area for erosion control or other purposes related to conservation or soil improvement. The Guidelines to provide a link to NRCS State Field Office Technical Guide for list of approved cover crop species: efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/details (<https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/details>).




More Information

You can find more information about cover crops and cash crop insurability in county special provisions on the Actuarial Information Browser (<https://webapp.rma.usda.gov/apps/actuarialinformationbrowser/>) . All relevant information for cover crops and crop insurance, including answers to frequently asked questions, go to the RMA Cover Crops (/Topics/Cover-Crops) page.

To download copies of this fact sheet and others, visit our online publications/fact sheets (/Topics/National-Fact-Sheets) page.

Where to Buy Crop Insurance

All multi-peril crop insurance, including CAT policies, are available from private crop insurance agents. A list of crop insurance agents is available at all USDA service centers and on the RMA website on the Agent Locator (/Information-Tools/Agent-Locator) page .

 National Office
<p> USDA/RMA/Stop 0801/Room 2004-South 1400 Independence Ave. SW Washington, DC 20250</p> <p> Email: FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov (mailto:FPAC.BC.Press@usda.gov? subject=Email%20from%20RMA%20Web)</p>

This fact sheet gives only a general overview of the crop insurance program and is not a complete policy. For further information and an evaluation of your risk management needs, contact a crop insurance agent.

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