

Farm Agronomic Practices Program

\$25,000 Total Available for FY2007

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) announces the Farm Agronomic Practices Program (FAP Program). The goal of the FAP Program is to provide Vermont farms with state financial assistance for the implementation of soil-based practices that improve soil quality, increase crop production, and reduce erosion and agricultural waste discharges. The FAP Program also encourages outreach on agricultural water quality impacts and agricultural water quality regulations through educational and instructional activity grants.

Any land under contract to receive payment for cover cropping, strip cropping, conservation crop rotation, or cross-slope tillage, or otherwise currently within a contract lifespan for one of these practices, from any other state or federal program is ineligible to receive FAP Program payments for the same conservation practice.

Conservation Practices eligible for assistance are prioritized in the following order:

- 1. Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) Maintenance/Update;**
- 2. Cover Cropping;**
- 3. Strip Cropping;**
- 4. Conservation Crop Rotation; and**
- 5. Cross-Slope Tillage.**

NMP Maintenance/Update

The purpose of the NMP maintenance/update payment is to continue nutrient management planning on land otherwise ineligible for a state NMP Incentive Grant. FAP Program payments for NMP update and maintenance are up to \$2/acre on eligible land. Eligibility is dependant upon:

- having a completed a NMP Incentive Grant (1 year of development and 3 years of maintenance) or
- having completed Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contractual requirements for a TPC590 NMP (2003 later) and no longer receiving payment.

Plan maintenance must meet or exceed NMP technical requirements of the General Permit for Medium Farm Operations. Payment is dependant upon submission of the NMP update and review by VAAFAM for technical compliance.

Cover Cropping

The purpose of cover cropping is to establish a seasonal cover on annual cropland for soil erosion reduction and conservation purposes. Program payments for cover cropping are up to \$20 per acre (80% of the federal incentive rate of \$25 per acre). Seasonal cover shall consist of a crop of close growing grasses, legumes, forbs, or other herbaceous plants and must meet the specifications of NRCS TPC340 in order to receive payment.

Strip Cropping

Strip cropping is the management of row crops, forages, small grains, or fallow land in a systematic arrangement of equal width strips across a field for soil erosion reduction and conservation purposes. Program payments for strip cropping are up to \$24 per acre (80% of the federal incentive rate of \$30 per acre). Strip cropping must meet the specifications of NRCS TPC585 and NRCS TPC512 Pasture and Hay Planting in order to receive payment. Program participants are responsible for maintaining crop strips for the contract lifespan of 10 years (as required by NRCS TPC512).

Conservation Crop Rotation

The purpose of conservation crop rotation is to lower soil erosion and promote conservation by growing crops in a recurring sequence on the same field. Program payments for conservation crop rotation are up to \$25 per acre (10% of the federal payment of \$250 per acre). Conservation crop rotation must meet the specifications of NRCS TPC328 in order to receive payment. Program participants are responsible for implementing a full, multi-year rotation to meet the tolerable soil loss rate. The conservation crop rotation contract lifespan is dependant upon (and is equal to) the length of the rotation.

Cross-Slope Tillage

Cross-slope tillage is a system of crop rows on planned grades in lengths designed to reduce soil erosion and promote conservation. Program payments for cross-slope tillage are up to \$10 per acre. Cross-slope tillage must meet the specifications of NRCS TPC557 Row Arrangement.

The FAP Program Educational and Instructional Activities

The purposes of FAP Program educational and instructional activity grants are to inform the farmers and citizens of Vermont of:

- the impact on Vermont waters of agricultural waste discharges and
- the federal and state requirements for controlling agricultural waste discharges.

Application for an educational and instructional activity grant must include a description of activity objectives, target audience, and learning materials. Grant awards are application-specific and are limited to a maximum of \$1,000. Payment is contingent upon a submission and review of an attendee list, material covered, and activity evaluations completed by attendees. Evaluation forms will be provided by VAAFMM prior to the activity.