

AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS

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**Farm Agronomic Practices (FAP) Grant Program – Fact Sheet**

The goal of the FAP Grant Program is to encourage the implementation of soil-based practices that improve soil quality, increase crop production, and reduce erosion and agricultural waste discharges. The FAP Grant 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, cross-slope tillage, conservation tillage, alternative manure incorporation, or otherwise currently within a contract lifespan for one of these practices from any other state or federal program, may be ineligible to receive FAP Grant Program payments for the same conservation practice.

Pending that funding is available, the FAP Grant Program payment cap is \$5,000 per farm per year within the state fiscal year (July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010) and all practices must be performed during the 2010 state fiscal year. Conservation Practices eligible for assistance may be prioritized or acreage limits may be established by the Agency as funding becomes limited.

Applications for winter cover cropping must be received by August 1 and applications for cropping and tillage practices must be received by December 1 and prior to implementing the practice(s). Activities for the Educational and Instructional Activities Grant cannot occur prior to program acceptance.

1. Cover Cropping

Practice Description: The purpose of cover cropping is to establish a seasonal cover on annual cropland for soil erosion reduction and conservation purposes. Seasonal cover shall consist of a crop of close growing grasses, legumes, forbs, or other herbaceous plants seeded at a minimum rate of 100 lbs/acre in order to gain effective soil coverage. Cover crops should be planted as soon as possible after previous crop harvest. Cover crop establishment shall be timed so that the soil will be adequately protected during critical erosion periods and selected cover crops will have the physical characteristics necessary to provide adequate soil loss protection. Nurse crops in perennial hay crop forages are included in this program.

Program Payment: Up to \$30 per acre for cover crops and up to \$25 per acre for nurse crops in perennial hay crop forages.

Program Requirements: All cover crops must be seeded at a minimum of 100 pounds per acre and seeding must be completed by October 15th to be eligible. A notice of practice completion and a claim for payment must be submitted to the Agency in the year you were approved in order to receive grant funds (for fall enrollment the deadline is December 31st and for spring enrollment the deadline is June 30th). A FAP Cover Crop application including field maps with the following information must be submitted to receive payment: date of planting, FSA tract and field identification, and seeding rate.

2. Strip Cropping

Description: 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 Payment: Up to \$25 per acre. Payment includes all crop land that is part of the strip cropping system.

Program Requirements: Strip cropping widths may vary, but strips closest to waters of the State and ditches must be comprised of perennial vegetation, at least 50 feet wide and have manure and fertilizer application setbacks of at least 25 feet from the top of bank. A FAP Cropping and Tillage application including field maps with the following information must be submitted to receive payment: FSA tract and field identification, strip cropping widths and crops within each strip, and planned crop rotations for each field.

3. Conservation Crop Rotation

Practice Description: 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. Land is eligible for this practice at the time of seeding to a perennial forage.

Program payment: Up to \$25 per acre.

Program Requirements: Specifications for establishment and operation of this practice shall be prepared on a field by field basis and include the sequence of crops to be grown, length of time each crop will be grown and total length of rotation. Program participants are responsible for implementing a full, multi-year rotation to meet or exceed the tolerable soil loss rate. Program payments are eligible for a onetime payment only at the period of the rotation where annual crop land is seeded down into perennial forages. RUSLE2 (Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation v2) calculations are required for each field and field maps with the following information must be submitted along with a FAP Cropping and Tillage application to receive payment: FSA tract and field identification, and planned crop rotations and date of planting for each field.

4. *Cross-Slope Tillage*

Practice Description: Cross-slope tillage is a system of crop rows on planned grades in lengths designed to reduce soil erosion and promote conservation.

Program payment: Up to \$10 per acre.

Program Requirements: Tillage and crop planting shall be conducted by following the contours of the land and shall be designed to accommodate the type and size of farm equipment to be used in the field. Eligible fields are those with slopes equal to or greater than 5% and it is up to the applicant to provide proof of the slope. A FAP Cropping and Tillage application including field maps with the following information must be submitted to receive payment: FSA tract and field identification.

5. *Zone-till, No-till, Mulch-till, and Aeration Tillage (Conservation Tillage)*

Practice Description: The purpose of zone-till, no-till, and aeration tillage is to manage the amount of crop and plant residues on the soil surface and to limit soil disturbance to only practices necessary to place nutrients and plant crops. No till is a practice where the soil is left undisturbed from harvest to planting and crops are planted directly into the existing residue. Zone till is a practice where a strip no greater than ten inches wide is created in existing residue and the crop is planted within the strip. Mulch till is a practice where a minimum of 30 percent of the soil surface is covered by plant residue immediately following planting of the crop. Aeration is a type of minimum tillage that is to be used in conjunction with conventional liquid manure application on perennial croplands.

Program Payment: Up to \$12 per acre.

Program Requirements: No full width tillage shall be performed regardless of tillage depth (except for mulch till and aeration as needed to properly implement the practice), previous crop residues cannot be burned, and residues must be uniformly distributed over the entire soil surface where the practice is to be implemented. Soil aeration is only applicable to perennial forage crops and does not include chisel, moldboard, disk, subsoil or other forms of conventional tillage. A FAP Cropping and Tillage application including field maps with the following information must be submitted to receive payment: FSA tract and field identification; planned crop rotations and date of planting for planting practices; and date of aeration and manure application for aeration practices.

6. **Alternative Manure Incorporation**

Practice Description: The purpose of alternative manure incorporation is to encourage producers to apply liquid manure at close proximity to or below the soil surface and incorporate the manure into the soil simultaneously with a single implement. Manure injection, aeration done at the same time as a low level splash plate manure application, and aeration prior to drag line low level splash plate manure application are eligible for this practice.

Program Payment: Up to \$25 per acre.

Program Requirements: This program is limited to manure application that will not be incorporated into the soil by alternative tillage methods such as chisel, moldboard, disk, subsoil, or other forms of tillage. A FAP Cropping and Tillage application including field maps with the following information must be submitted to receive payment: FSA tract and field identification, current crop and manure application rate.

The FAP Grant Program Educational and Instructional Activities

The purposes of FAP Grant 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 the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets prior to the activity.