

A news release from the Maryland Department of Agriculture

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MDA and NRCS Team Up to Offer Farmers Better Incentives to Plant Cover Crops

ANNAPOLIS, MD (April 26, 2010) -The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have teamed up to offer Maryland farmers more choices and better incentives to plant cover crops in their fields this fall. This year, MDA will provide farmers with approximately \$15 million to plant cover crops. NRCS has made an additional \$3 million available to farmers who plant traditional or harvested cover crops this fall. Sign-up is open now for the NRCS program. Sign-up for the MDA program will take place from June 21-July 15, 2010.

"We are pleased to team up with NRCS to provide farmers with more options to plant cover crops in their fields this fall," said Maryland Agriculture Secretary Earl F. Hance. "Cover crops figure prominently in Governor Martin O'Malley's two-year milestones to speed up the Chesapeake Bay restoration. They are one of the most cost-effective and sustainable ways to protect crop fields from soil erosion and waterways from nutrient runoff," he added.

"The Cover Crop Program is just one example of our commitment to work together to help farmers improve water quality and better manage natural resources on their farms," said Jon Hall, NRCS State Conservationist. "Sign-up for the NRCS program is ongoing, but we're asking farmers to apply as soon as possible as funding is limited."

Cover crops are small grains such as wheat, rye and barley that help farmers reduce nutrient runoff, control soil erosion and protect water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. This year, farmers can choose from several cover crop planting options.

Farmers who choose to plant cover crops for harvest can receive \$51/acre from NRCS or \$25/an acre from MDA. The MDA payment increases to \$35/acre if rye is used as the cover crop.

Farmers who plant traditional cover crops may receive \$51 an acre from NRCS or \$40/acre from MDA. This year, farmers who plant traditional cover crops using NRCS or MDA funds can receive up to \$55/acre in additional incentive payments for using highly valued planting practices. The maximum payment under this option is \$106/acre.

Cover crops are cereal grains and winter annual brassicas (plants in the cabbage family), such as rapeseed, that may be planted to scavenge excess nutrients that remain in the soil following production of corn, soybeans,

sorghum, tobacco or vegetables. Special incentives are available to farmers who plant rye. All seed used is required to meet Maryland Seed Law and Regulatory Standards and have a minimum germination rate of 80 percent.

MDA's 2010-2011 Cover Crop Program is administered by the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program and funded largely by the 2010 Chesapeake Bay Trust Fund and the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund. Applicants must be in good standing with MACS to participate and must be in compliance with the Nutrient Management Program. The USDA-NRCS Program is funded through the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative.

Farmers should contact their local soil conservation district office right away to enroll in the NRCS Cover Crop Program. The enrollment dates for the MDA program are June 21-July 15, 2010.

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