

A photograph of a field with green cover crops growing in rows, surrounded by dry, yellowed grass.

COVER CROP PREMIUM DISCOUNT PROGRAM

FALL COVERS FOR SPRING SAVINGS FAQ

The Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) is offering farmers that plant cover crops a \$5/acre discount on their crop insurance bill. IDOA's Cover Crop Premium Discount Program is offered for acres of cover crops installed outside of state and federal program incentives (e.g., EQIP, CSP and state cost share), and will be available on a first-come, first-served basis on 50,000 acres across Illinois. IDOA is supporting 50,000 acres of cover crops with this year's funding. Below is a list of frequently asked questions for this program.

HOW DO I REPORT COVER CROP ACRES?

Cover crop acres can be reported at your local county FSA office by completing the report of commodities form 578. IDOA must provide information on eligible acres to the Risk Management Agency (USDA-RMA) in a form that is recognizable to their process. Collecting information consistent with their forms will streamline the process and make it easier to process the premium discount timely and accurately.

WHAT IF MY INSURANCE COMPANY DOESN'T OFFER THIS PROGRAM?

The USDA-RMA has agreements in place with individual Approved Insurance Providers (AIP) who have opted in to participate in this program. Any eligible applicant that utilizes the services of AIPs that have opted to offer this program will be considered eligible for the IDOA cover crop premium discount program. Applicants that use AIPs that have not elected to participate, will not be eligible for this program.

WHAT IF I SIGN-UP BUT CHANGE MY MIND ON WHAT FIELDS I SEED TO COVER CROPS?

Cover crops should be seeded according to the Midwest Cover Crop Council guidelines prior to applying. If necessary, the application could be submitted after seeding, but before sign-up closes, to prevent a change in fields enrolled.

CAN I UTILIZE THIS PRODUCER PREMIUM REDUCTION ON ACRES COST-SHARED THROUGH OTHER STATE AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS?

This program is designed to incentivize additional acres of cover crops beyond those supported by IDOA and/or USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA NRCS). IDOA will verify applications through the Cover Crop Premium Discount Program and cross-reference with other state and federal programs to avoid overlapping acres. However, this program would allow acres in addition to cost-shared acres. *For example, if a farmer has 160 acres enrolled in a state program and decides to plant 320 acres of cover crops, the additional 160 acres will be eligible for the Cover Crop Premium Discount Program.*

HOW WILL IDOA VERIFY ELIGIBLE ACRES?

IDOA will use a combination of tools to verify acres in cover crops applied for through this program. Applications will be reviewed for overlap in enrollment of other federal and state programs. IDOA will then employ a variety of tools at their discretion. Applicants may be asked to provide further documentation (e.g., seed bills, seeding method, and timing of planting) to confirm applied fields were seeded to cover crops.

CAN I GRAZE OR HARVEST FORAGE FROM MY COVER CROP?

Yes, this program and federal crop insurance programs allow for managed haying and grazing of cover crops if this management does not jeopardize the intended function of the cover crop and that termination guidelines developed by USDA-RMA and USDA-NRCS are followed.

CAN COVER CROPS IN THIS PROGRAM BE HARVESTED FOR GRAIN?

No, the harvest of grain from cover crops is not the intended use of cover crops and would run contrary to federal crop insurance termination deadlines and insurable crop determinations. *For example, if wheat was planted as a cover crop but not terminated according to the USDA-NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/climatechange/?cid=stelprdb1077238#Guidelines> and harvested for grain it is not considered a cover crop and would be ineligible for the premium discount.*

WHAT IF I DON'T UTILIZE FEDERALLY SUBSIDIZED CROP INSURANCE?

This program is only for those with coverage through the federal crop insurance program and only eligible for those that are assessed a premium for the coverage. In instances where no premium liability is due or absent enrollment in the federal crop insurance program, the farmer/landowner would not be eligible for this program. There may be other state or federal programs available for these producers.

WHAT IS THE LIMIT ON ACREAGE AN INDIVIDUAL FARMER CAN APPLY FOR?

This premium discount program will not impose caps on eligible acres (absent state/federal program acres) for individual applications. *For example, a farmer who applies with 800 acres of cover crops with no acreage enrolled in other state/federal programs is eligible for the entire 800 acres.*

HOW MUCH FUNDING DOES IDOA HAVE FOR THIS PROGRAM? WHAT HAPPENS IF SIGN-UPS EXCEED AVAILABLE FUNDING?

IDOA has established a one-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with USDA-RMA to fund this program up to 50,000 acres. IDOA will select applications on a first come, first serve basis pending verification of meeting program rules.

DO I SIGN UP FOR THIS PROGRAM THROUGH THE USDA-NRCS OR USDA-FSA OFFICES?

No, this program is set up independent from traditional state or federal programs administered through the USDA-NRCS or USDA-FSA offices. If you need assistance in applying for this program, please consult your local SWCD office staff or the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) Bureau of Land and Water Resources at 217-782-6297.

WHAT GUIDELINES FOR PLANTING AND SEEDING COVER CROPS SHOULD I FOLLOW?

Midwest Cover Crop Council - Cover Crop Tool website should be used as a guide for cover crop establishment. It includes planting guidelines, seeding dates, appropriate seeding rates, and seed mixes to ensure objectives of the cover crop are being met. Click here to view the website: <http://mccc.msu.edu/covercroptool/covercroptool.php>

WHY IS THIS PROGRAM IMPORTANT?

In 2015 Illinois released the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy. This strategy identifies cover crops as one of the main in-field management practices that will need to be voluntarily implemented to reduce nitrate and phosphorus losses from non-point source cropland.

CAN I APPLY FOR THIS PROGRAM AGAIN IF I WAS APPROVED OR APPLIED LAST YEAR?

Cover crop acres that are not enrolled in state and federal programs are eligible for the premium discount. *For example, if you enrolled or applied for the program in 2019 on an 80 acre field and have cover crops on that same field again in 2020 it is eligible for the premium discount and can be included in the application.*