



Cover Crop Termination Guidelines



NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines Version 4: June 2019

Cover Crops and Crop Insurance Overview – What you need to know as a producer:

Prior to the passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, the NRCS Cover Crop Termination Guidelines (Guidelines) had to be followed, or a deviation had to be approved in advance, for insurance to attach to a crop planted in a management system that included cover crops. However, cover crop adoption and regional availability of data on successful cover crop management have expanded significantly since the last Guidelines revision in 2014. For crops planted in the 2020 crop year and later, insurance will now attach at time of planting the insured crop and cover crop management practices will be reviewed under Risk Management Agency (RMA) rules for Good Farming Practice (GFP) determinations similar to other management decisions (e.g. fertilizer application, seeding rates, etc.)

Insurance attaches at planting 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.

These Guidelines¹ are not intended as a substitute for best locally adaptive management for cover crop termination timing that optimizes water use efficiency, erosion control, soil health improvement, weed and pest control, allelopathy, habitat for beneficial organisms, nutrient cycling, and water quality improvement. The Guidelines provide a pre-approved latest end date for termination from a water availability standpoint for USDA programs. The Guidelines only apply to non-irrigated cropland, including systems that contain a fallow period. Cover crops in an irrigated cropping system should be terminated based on the crop system, water availability, and the conservation purpose, but before the planted crop emerges.

BACKGROUND

To ensure that USDA policies are coordinated and up to date with evolving cover crop practices, the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the administrators of RMA and Farm Service Agency (FSA) organized an interagency workgroup to develop consistent, simple and flexible policy across the three agencies. National and local experts, along with multiple stakeholders, were involved in the process. Research literature, plant growth, soil hydrology models, and input from national/local experts in cover crop management provided the basis for the Guidelines to achieve their conservation benefits while minimizing risk of reducing yield to the following crop due to soil water use. These Guidelines are applicable to all USDA programs. The agencies welcome stakeholders to provide literature and data for use in improving these Guidelines over time. To share literature and data, stakeholders may contact their local NRCS office.

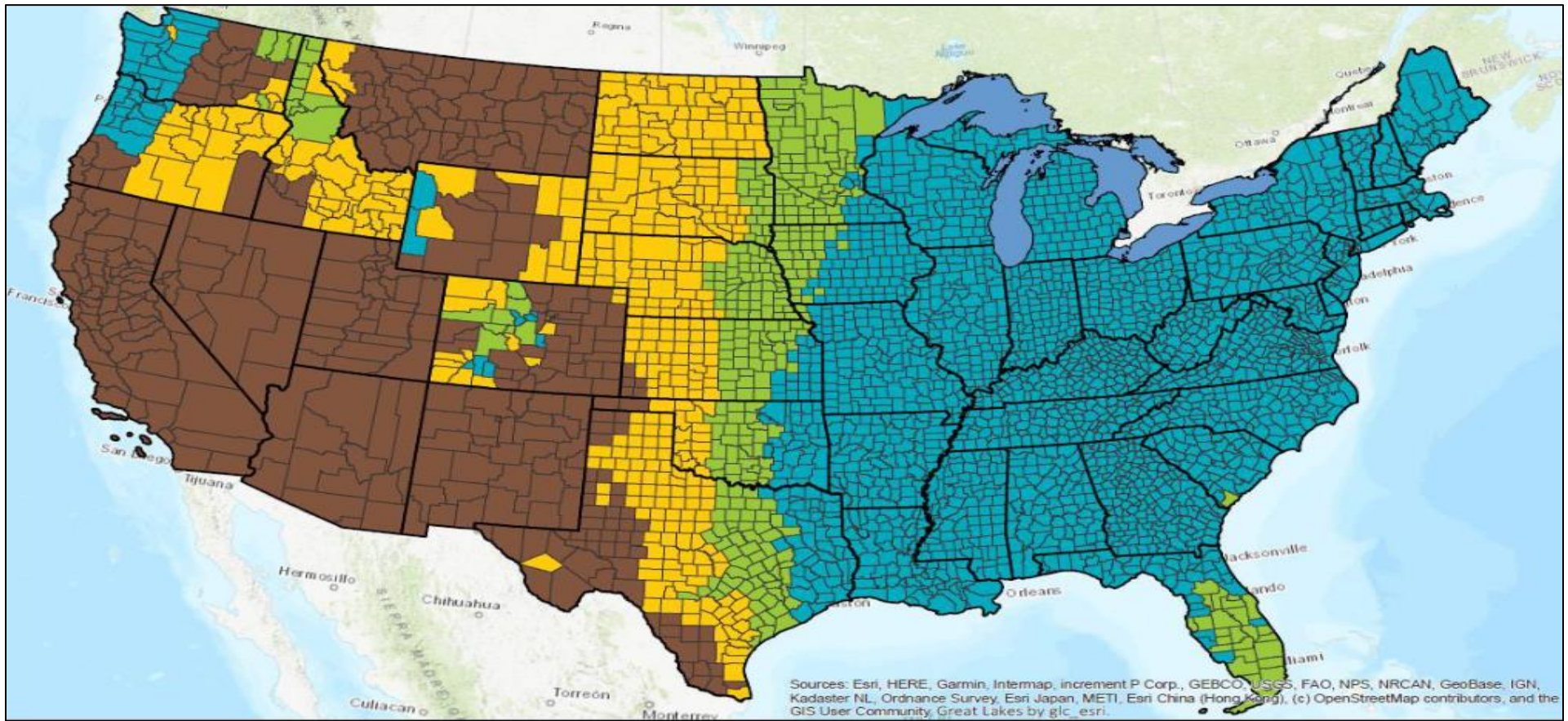
¹ The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide an additional level of comfort for producers that may be unfamiliar with cover crops and want up front assurance that their crop is insured and their cover cropping management decisions will be considered a GFP. These Guidelines serve as a recognized nationally applicable agricultural expert resource for cover crop termination in cover cropping management systems. However, producers may also be implementing innovative cover cropping systems that fall outside these Guidelines. To help maximize additional flexibility and up - front assurance, producers can choose to pursue any one of the following options to assure that their cover cropping management system is a GFP:

1. A producer can follow the generalized zonal guidance provided in these Guidelines,
2. A producer can 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)
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.

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Cover Crop Termination Guidelines



- Zone 1 - Terminated Cover Crop 35 Days or Earlier Before Planting, except for RMA Summerfallow Practice.
- Zone 2 - Terminated Cover Crop 15 Days or Earlier Before Planting, except for RMA Summerfallow Practice.
- Zone 3 - Terminated Cover Crop at or Before Planting, except for RMA Summerfallow Practice.
- Zone 4 - Terminated Cover Crop Before Crop Emergence.



Cover Crop Termination Guidelines



Map Legend

Zone 1 – See Map	Zone 2 – See Map	Zone 3 – See Map	Zone 4 – See Map
<p>For Late Spring to Fall Seeded Crops – Terminate cover crops 35 days or earlier prior to planting the crop.</p> <p>Early Spring Seeded Crops – Terminate cover crops as soon as practical prior to planting the crop. (Additional Zone Guidance #2 and Definition #12.)</p>	<p>For Late Spring to Fall Seeded Crops – Terminate cover crops 15 days or earlier prior to planting the crop.</p> <p>Early Spring Seeded Crops – Terminate cover crops as soon as practical prior to planting the crop. (Additional Zone Guidance #2 and Definition #12.)</p>	<p>Terminate cover crop at or before planting the crop</p>	<p>Terminate cover crop before crop emergence.</p>
<p>RMA Designated Summerfallow Practice (See Definition #13 for additional guidance)</p>	<p>RMA Designated Summerfallow Practice (See Definition #13 for additional guidance)</p>	<p>RMA Designated Summerfallow Practice (See Definition #13 for additional guidance)</p>	

Additional Zone Guidance

1. If the cover crop is part of a no-till system, termination may be delayed up to 7 days from the zone-based termination deadline.
2. Fall seeded cover crops will have limited growth in the spring prior to “early” spring seeded crops, seeded prior to March 20, (e.g., spring wheat, sugar beets, corn), and therefore the cover crop may be terminated as late as at crop planting.
3. When earlier than normal planting occurs due to favorable weather or soil conditions, cover crop termination will naturally occur closer to planting. For example, if planting occurs 15 days earlier than normal, the cover crop termination period may be 15 days closer to planting (or at planting in zone 2).
4. If the season is drier than normal nearing cover crop termination time, consider an earlier termination to conserve soil moisture.
5. If the spring season is wetter than normal at cover crop termination time, consider a later termination to use excess soil moisture, increase infiltration of additional rain, and improve soil health and seedbed condition. For example, in zone 2, if the field is too wet to terminate a cover crop 15 days before planting, the cover crop may be terminated closer to planting.
6. Seasonal cover species used as herbaceous wind barriers or nurse crops (short season cover crops) that protect the insured crop as it establishes (see definitions) are not considered cover crops and do not impede insurability. The seasonal covers used for the purpose of early crop establishment must be appropriate species for the area and the planned purpose.