

COVER CROPS FOR NO-TILL COTTON

DEFINITION: A crop of close growing legumes and/or small grains grown primarily for seasonal protection from soil erosion and soil improvement.

PURPOSE: Control erosion, reduce runoff, and improve organic matter and water infiltration, suppress spring and summer weed development, decrease soil water loss, improve soil tilth and aeration, enhance soil nitrogen content, utilize excess nutrients from previous crop and serve as wildlife habitat.



CRITERIA

ESTABLISHMENT METHODS: Seedbeds may be prepared conventionally using commonly available tillage tools but should be prepared no earlier than two weeks prior to planting. Tillage on highly erodible fields should be limited to only that necessary to acquire an adequate seedbed. The cover may also be established by aerial seeding into the standing cotton crop prior to leaf drop. The cover crop can be established after cotton harvest and shredding of the cotton stalks by no-till drilling of the seed into this cover condition or the residue from any previous crop. Recommended cover crops and cultural specifications for use in Mississippi are provided in the table below.

Cover crops and cultural specifications for Mississippi.

Cover Crop	Planting Rate ^{2/} ----lb/acre----	Planting Date ^{1/}	Planting Depth ----inches----
Wheat	60-90	Sept 1 - November 1 - Zone 1 ^{3/} Sept 15-November 15 - Zone 2	1-1.5
Cereal rye	60-90	Sept 1 - November 1 - Zone 1 Sept 15-November 15 - Zone 2	1-1.5
Crimson clover	15-20	Sept 1 - November 1 - Zone 1 Sept 15-November 15 - Zone 2	1/4 – 1/2
Hairy vetch	20-30	Sept 1 - November 1 - Zone 1 Sept 15-November 15 - Zone 2	1-1.5

1/ - Do not plant cover crops after the last recommended planting date for a given zone. Later planting dates may result in poor cover crop establishment and growth. 2/ - low rate for drill planted and high rate for broadcast planted. 3/ - Refer to cover crop zone map for zone location.

BURNDOWN OF COVER CROP: Cover crop will be burndown one to two weeks prior to planting cotton. Contact local extension service for recommended herbicides and rates for cover crop burndown. Proper planting equipment may give the producer the option to plant and burndown in one operation.

Cover Crop Planting Zones



For more information or questions concerning cover crops contact your local NRCS office.