



May 26, 2020

Dear Farmer,

Improving your farm's soil quality and health is important and we recognize that management changes can come with increased risk and cost. To reduce that burden, our nonprofit has applied for and received funding to support farmers in trying soil health practices that build resilient, healthy soils.

North Jersey RC&D is inviting you to participate in a Soil Health & Cover Crop On-Farm Research Trial. We are seeking 25 farmers, conventional to organic, to commit to using an innovative spring cover crop management strategy on a portion of your land for two years. The strategies include (1) planting into green cover crop, (2) roller-crimping or (3) grazing cover crop with livestock. This opportunity is supported by the Conservation Innovation Grants program at USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

As compensation for trying and evaluating these conservation approaches, selected farmers will receive **up to \$25,000 in financial incentives**. This includes a \$1,000 annual stipend for time/labor recording economic and agronomic practices and annual per-acre-payments (\$35-\$300) for every acre enrolled in the study. The grant also provides farmers with a equipment incentive budget, to purchase needed equipment and supplies (high-end planter attachments, roller crimpers, and fence and waterer supplies).

North Jersey RC&D is a nonprofit that is dedicated to conservation. We are seeking to conduct the trial on a wide diversity of farms from small vegetable to large grain operations, under both organic and conventional management. Technical assistance will be provided to aid in successful management of the selected termination strategy. Soil samples will be collected to give greater detail on the impact of practices on soil health.

We encourage you to take advantage of this unique opportunity to experiment with some advanced soil health practices. If you have experience using cover crop and are located in Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon, Somerset or Morris counties, this opportunity is available to you.

LEARN MORE AND APPLY by July 1st at www.northjerseyrcd.org/on-farm-trials or mail in the attached application. If you have any questions, please contact Bridgett Hilshey, Agricultural Specialist, at bhilshey@northjerseyrcd.org or by phone at (908) 574-5368. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Laura Tessieri, Executive Director

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www.northjerseyrcd.org

DO YOU USE
COVER CROP?

TAKE PART IN AN INNOVATIVE COVER CROP ON-FARM RESEARCH TRIAL

FARMER RESPONSIBILITIES

Try out **one** of these innovative cover crop management strategies for two years and record the economic and agro-nomic impacts.

① PLANTING GREEN

"Planting Green" refers to planting cash crops into living cover crops; cover crops are terminated with herbicide during or shortly after planting.

OR

② ROLLER CRIMPING

Rolling-crimping is a means of mechanically terminating the cover crop by crushing and snapping of the plant when the cover crop is more mature.

OR

③ GRAZING COVER CROP

Intensively grazing cover crop with livestock can provide high-quality feed for animals and fertilizer for fields while stunting cover crop development.

INCENTIVES

In return, North Jersey RC&D will provide study participants with the following:

Most participants will receive between \$15,000 and \$25,000 in incentives!

① EQUIPMENT!

Farmers in the study are eligible to receive up to \$20,000 in equipment that supports program goals.

② REIMBURSEMENT FOR TIME

All participants will receive \$1,000 a year, for two years, as compensation for their time spent keeping agronomic and economic data.

③ PER-ACRE PAYMENTS

Participants will receive payment for every acre enrolled in the study: \$300/acre per year for vegetable ground and \$35/acre for land in grain/bean production.

④ FREE SOIL TESTING

Land enrolled in the study will receive comprehensive soil health assessments.



Who is North Jersey RC&D?

We are a non-profit dedicated to community needs through conservation.

DO YOU HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

Join North Jersey RC&D staff for a short webinar on June 10th, 2020 from 8:00 - 9:00 pm.

We will briefly discuss the opportunity and answer any questions you may have about the program.

Register at www.northjerseyrcd.org/webinar

APPLY TODAY!

Submit the application by mail OR apply online at www.northjerseyrcd.org/on-farm-trials

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is North Jersey RC&D?

North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development is a non-profit dedicated to fostering agricultural sustainability. North Jersey RC&D works throughout Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon, Morris, Somerset & Union counties. Visit our website, www.northjerseyrcd.org, to learn more about our programs, initiatives, and events.

How is the project funded?

The funding is provided through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) inaugural On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials—a new feature of the 2018 Farm Bill. Through this grant, North Jersey RC&D received over \$560,000 for farmer incentive payments.

What is the purpose of the project?

This project aims to evaluate and encourage spring cover crop management strategies that confer the greatest soil health benefit. The project will use a combination of soil samples, field assessments, farm data, and farmer interviews to (1) evaluate the environmental, economic, and social impacts of these of innovative cover crop management practices and (2) document implementation methods that are most successful, providing local examples to other farmers.

When does it start?

Participants will be selected by August 2020. During fall of 2020, farmers enrolled in the program will work with North Jersey RC&D staff to prepare for the project by either (1) selecting, purchasing, and installing upgrades to planters and/or sprayers (2) selecting and purchasing roller crimper units or (3) contracting to install necessary grazing equipment. In addition, farmers enrolled in the programs will consult with North Jersey RC&D to select fields for inclusion in the trial and receive instruction regarding documentation requirements. The on-farm trial will formally begin spring of 2021.

How long does it last?

Two years. Farmers will need to commit to their chosen alternative cover crop management practices during the spring of 2021 and 2022.

How are the participants chosen? What are the requirements to participate?

We are looking to enroll 25 northern New Jersey farmers in the on-farm trial. We are looking to get a mixture of commodity crop farmers and vegetable producers – both organic and conventional. The only requirements for inclusion in the program are that participants (1) have experience with cover crop, and (2) be NRCS EQIP eligible (Of note, the Adjusted Gross Income requirement can be waived for this program).

Farmers will be evaluated on experience using cover crop and acreage being enrolled. Selection consideration will be given to location, termination method selected and if a producer meets the definition of historically underserved.

What if I already plant green or graze cover crop? Can I still participate?

Yes! If you are already implementing these innovative practices, you can still participate and will be eligible for all the same funding opportunities.

How much paperwork is involved?

At the start of the trial, each participant will be provided with a binder filled with short forms. Farmers will be asked to record things like planting population, fertilizer and herbicide inputs and rates, yields, etc. We anticipate the paperwork taking about 4-6 hours a year.

How much land can I enroll? Do I need to do the practice over my entire farm?

Farmers can enroll up to half of their cropland acres, not to exceed 100 acres. This will be the area that undergoes the innovative management, known as the treatment plot. Payment per acre is on acres in the treatment plot.

Each farm will need to have a treatment plot and a control plot. The treatment plot will receive the innovative management strategy while the control plot will be terminated in the method you are accustomed to.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will I have to plant a specific cover crop mix? And what if I don't have a drill?

No specific mix or application method is required. Farmers can plant any cover crop they would like, using any cover crop application method they have available.

Can I experiment with more than one practice?

Yes. Farmers can sign up to try more than one innovative cover crop management strategy. For example, a farmer could graze cover crop near the barn and roller-crimp cover crop in another area of the farm; farmers participating in multiple practices are eligible for multiple equipment incentive payments.

Can I pick the equipment I want as part of the "Equipment Incentive"?

Every participant will be assigned an "equipment incentive budget". Farmers can select any equipment within the budget that will increase their likelihood of success in implementing the practice. The chart below lists examples of equipment participants can receive through the equipment incentive; participants may also request other equipment.

PLANTING GREEN	Coulters Disc Openers Row Cleaners Closing Wheels Downforce Systems Spray Nozzles
ROLLER CRIMPER	Frame-mounted roller-crimper (Dawn/Yetter) Pull behind roller-crimper
GRAZING COVER CROPS	Permanent Fence Temporary Fence Energizers Portable Watering Systems

How much money do I get to spend on new equipment and/or fence?

Most farmers can expect to receive between \$10,000 and \$14,000 for equipment upgrades, roller crimpers and/or fence installation. The exact amount will depend on applications received, producer need, number of acres enrolled and type of innovative management selected.

What if I want something to purchase equipment that is more than the amount I was budgeted through the "Equipment Incentive"?

Farmers interested in purchasing equipment whose cost exceeds the "Equipment Incentive" budget can still do so, as long as they agree to pay the difference.

Do I get to keep the equipment after the study is done?

Yes. Any equipment purchased is yours to use until completion of the grant. At the completion of the two-year trial, farmers may request to retain equipment purchased for the trial.

Can I apply if I have previously enrolled in EQIP or the aerial seeding cover crop program?

Yes, in fact we welcome farmers experienced with cover crop. The two programs are unrelated. This is a program run by North Jersey RC&D with funding from the Conservation Innovation Grants program at USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

What if I need help?

Participants will have access to free 1:1 consultation with NJRCD Agricultural Specialists, crop consultants from Rosetree Consulting, or Penn State Agricultural Extension agent, Heidi Reed, who specializes in planting green.

If I don't sign up this year, can I sign up next year?

No, this is a one-time opportunity and the only time to sign-up. This is the first time in over 20 years New Jersey farmers have had access to conservation innovation funding at this scale and scope. We encourage you to take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Please take a moment to complete the following short application. Application is non-binding; after we review the applications, we'll schedule a short on-farm discussion with applicants to talk more about the project.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Farmer Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email Address: _____

Farm Name: _____

Farm Address: _____

FARM AND EXPERIENCE INFORMATION

1. Please describe your operation and experience.

How long has the farm been in operation? How long have you been farming?

2. On a typical year, how many acres of each crop do you typically plant?

Corn: _____ Soybeans: _____ Small Grains: _____ Vegetables: _____ Other: _____

3. How many tillage/farmable acres do you (or agricultural operation) own versus rent?

Total Acres: _____ Owned: _____ Rented: _____

4. In what ways have you planted cover crop? Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conventional Drill | <input type="checkbox"/> No-till Drill | <input type="checkbox"/> Broadcasting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Broadcasting w/ incorporation | <input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Seeding | <input type="checkbox"/> Interseeding |

5. In what ways do you typically terminate cover crop? Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tillage | <input type="checkbox"/> Roller-Crimping | <input type="checkbox"/> Planting Green |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Herbicide | <input type="checkbox"/> Grazing | |

6. Describe your experience with cover crops? How many years have you used cover crops, over how many acres? How do you manage your cover crops, and has your management changed over time?

1. What form of innovative cover crop management strategy are you interested in trying through the on-farm trials? Mark all that apply.

- ☐ Planting Green
- ☐ Roller Crimping (Planter Mounted Roller Crimping Units)
- ☐ Roller Crimping (Pull or Push Tractor Mounted)
- ☐ Grazing Cover Crop: Type and Number of animals: _____ Who owns the animals: _____

2. Do you have any experience using any of the innovative cover crop management strategies listed above? If so, please describe below.

3. Please state any farm goals/priorities you'd like to share.

4. How many acres are you tentatively interested in enrolling in the on-farm trial?

Farmer can enroll anywhere between 1 and 100 acres in the program. _____

5. Which of the following farm business type is your operation?

- ☐ Individual (Sole proprietorship)
- ☐ Entity (Corporation, Limited Partnership, Trust, Estate, etc.)
- ☐ Joint Operation (General Partnership, Joint Venture)
- ☐ Not sure

6. Have you participated in USDA programs? If so list which programs. If you are not sure, just leave blank.

7. Do you file farm records with USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Do you qualify as a Historically Underserved Producer? Please indicate if you qualify for any of the following categories. These traditionally underserved groups will receive prioritization during the selection process.

☐ LIMITED RESOURCE FARMER

In each of the tax years 2017 and 2018, was your direct or indirect Gross Farm Sales less than or equal to \$180,300 per year AND in each of the tax years 2017 and 2018, was your Total Household Income less than the "County/Area Value" (Warren: \$43,010; Hunterdon: \$61,076; Sussex: \$48,471; Morris: \$61,717; Union: \$41,496)

☐ BEGINNING FARMER

Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years.

☐ SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED

Individual or entity who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. Socially disadvantaged groups consist of American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders and Hispanics.

☐ VETERAN

Who first obtained status as a veteran during the most recent 10-year period.