

Comparative Analysis of Cover Crop Incentive Programs in the Northeast

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Introduction: Farmers are increasingly interested in planting cover crops to improve soil health, reduce nutrient losses, and enhance pest suppression, and government agencies support the use of cover crops by offering cost-share programs. This research seeks to compare cover crop incentive programs and adoption rates in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, and Vermont and to understand the relationship between farmer adoption and incentive program structure.

New York

County programs: Chenango, Cortland, Madison, Otsego, Schuyler, Chemung, Steuben, Onondaga, Tompkins, and Tioga (1)

- **Payment:** \$80/acre
- **Requirements:** must add new acres, certified seeds
- **Restrictions:** No min. or max.; can be used with NRCS programs; only available through 2019-2020 growing season
- **Funding:** The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (DEC-USC)

Pennsylvania

County programs: Columbia, Montour, Northumberland, Union, Potter, Bedford, and Cumberland (2-6)

- **Payment:** On average, \$30/acre
- **Requirements:** Diverse species required in Northumberland, Montour, Bedford, and Union; Max. of 50 acres in Columbia, Montour, Northumberland, Cumberland, and Union; Funding only for silage corn, grain corn, or soybean acres in Cumberland
- **Restrictions:** Vary by county
- **Funding:** Various sources

Federal Programs

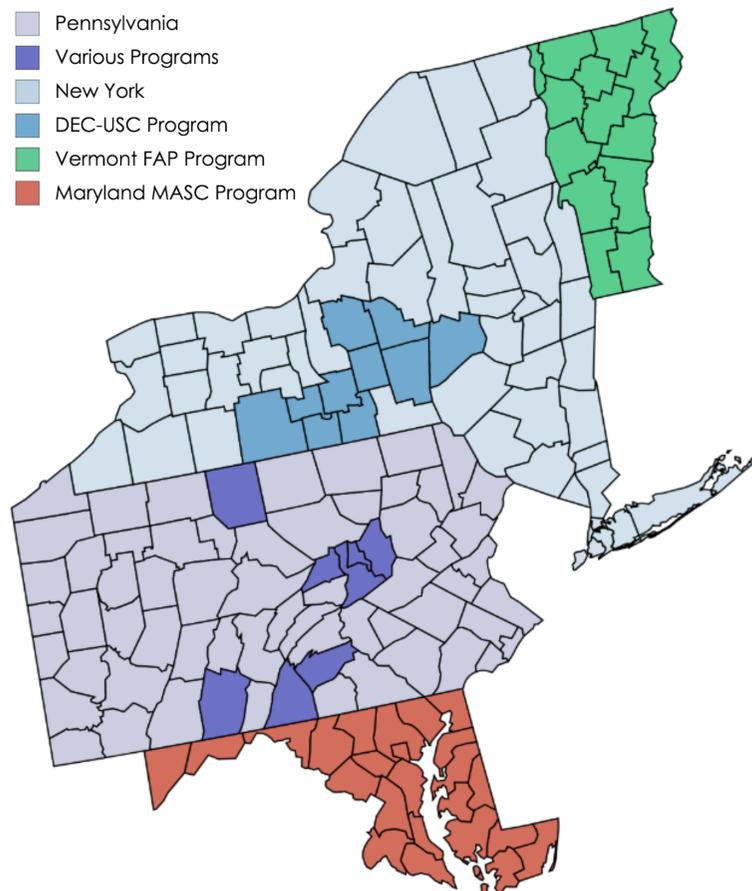
EQIP (7)

- **Payment:** On average \$55.35/acre; Increased rates for additional practices, historically underserved, or beginning farmers
- **Restrictions:** Max. of three annual payments

CSP (8)

- **Payment:** On average \$7.52/acre; Increased rates for additional practices, historically
- **Restrictions:** Payments to enhance existing systems; Min. annual payment of \$1,500; Max. annual payment of \$40,000

Map of Programs



*EQIP and CSP cover all counties in each state.

Summary Table

	MD	PA	NY	VT
Acres of annually planted cropland (9)	1,201,898	2,843,086	2,260,577	147,445
Percent of cropland cover cropped (9)	27%	16%	10%	14%
Cost-share from state program	\$25-\$90	n/a	n/a	\$30-\$40
Cost-share from county program	n/a	~\$30	\$80	n/a
EQIP - Basic (organic & non-organic)	\$50.81	\$53.59	\$65.98	\$51.03
CSP - Basic (organic & non-organic)	-	\$7.15	\$8.61	\$6.80

Vermont

Statewide program: Farm Agronomic Practices (FAP) (10)

- **Payment:** \$30-\$40/acre
- **Requirements:** Broadcast seeded at 100 lbs of seed/acre or drilled at recommended rate; must include shapefile or map of implemented practices
- **Restrictions:** Grants limited to \$5,000/farm; cannot be use with EQIP
- **Funding:** Vermont Government

Maryland

Statewide program : Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MASC) (11)

- **Payment:** \$45-\$90/acre for on-farm livestock forage; \$25-\$35 for cover crops planted for harvest
- **Requirements:** Nutrient management plan; must follow Maryland Seed Law
- **Restrictions:** Min. 5 acres, no max
- **Funding:** the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund and the Chesapeake Bay 2010 Trust Fund

References:

- 1) Dekar, E. USC Agriculture Coordinator. Personal communication
- 2) Columbia, Montour, Northumberland county: <https://www.columbiaccd.org/cover-crop-incentive-program.html>
- 3) Union County: <http://www.unioncountypa.org/departments/conservation-district/financial-assistance-programs/page.aspx?id=1663>
- 4) Potter Annual Report: http://pottercd.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/0949_001.pdf
- 5) Bedford County: <https://www.bedfordcountyconservation.com/Agriculture/agriculture.htm>
- 6) Cumberland County Conservation District Cover Crop Incentive Program Requirements (2018-2019)
- 7) EQIP: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/eqip/>
- 8) CSP: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/csp/?cid=nrcseprd1297344>
- 9) Vohl Hamilton, A. Maximizing the On-Farm Benefits of Cover Crops. The Pennsylvania State University. (2016).
- 10) FAP 2019 Overview. Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets'. (2019)
- 11) Astle, N. MASC Program Coordinator. Personal communication.

Preliminary Results: Cover crop incentive programs vary in terms of payments, requirements, restrictions, and farmer adoption. Statewide programs offer the best long-term support and potential for widespread adoption. Maryland's Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share program success is due to the relatively high payment rate and few limitations. County programs have the ability to tailor programs to address specific issues. The DEC-USC program is increasing new cover crop acres by offering few restrictions and high payments, while the Cumberland county program is specific to corn and soybean farms. Federal programs are useful for growers that want to adopt a new practice and do not have another cost-share program in their locale. EQIP is ideal for first time cover crop producers while CSP is useful for enhancing existing systems.

Next Steps: 1) continue to gather information about the different programs, 2) get updated data on cover crop adoption in each state, 3) interview farmers about the use and perceptions of cover crop incentive programs.

Help improve our project: We are seeking input from farmers, program administrators, researchers, and agricultural service providers. Contact Barbara Chami – Email: bac267@cornell.edu – Phone: 858-229-9122

This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under subaward number GNE18-166