



NEWS RELEASE

Office of the Secretary

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Maryland Department of Agriculture Announces Healthy Soil Biomass Pilot Program

ANNAPOLIS, MD (November 15, 2018) The Maryland Department of Agriculture has launched a *Healthy Soil Biomass Pilot Program* for farmers who were approved to participate in the department's 2018-2019 Winter Cover Crop Program, but were unable to plant all of their acreage. The pilot program will pay these farmers a flat rate of \$45/acre to plant qualifying small grains in leftover, unplanted fields to create a healthy soil biomass and protect water quality in nearby streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.

While the *Healthy Soil Biomass Pilot Program* works in a similar way to the department's traditional cover crop program, it is a separate and distinct program with its own set of rules and requirements. Only farmers who were previously approved to plant cover crops this fall are eligible to participate. These farmers may plant up to 500 acres of qualifying small grains on "leftover fields" that they did not plant in traditional cover crops. Farmers have a choice of planting methods, but only wheat, rye or triticale may be used as the seed source. The planting deadline for the pilot program is December 1, 2018.

Farmers will need to certify acreage planted under the *Healthy Soil Biomass Pilot Program* with their local soil conservation district within one week of planting. Killdown may not take place before May 1, 2019. **The *Healthy Soil Biomass Pilot Program* is a performance-based cost-share program. To qualify for the \$45/acre payment, a sufficient amount of biomass will need to be present by May 1.** Research shows that delaying killdown of a cover crop contributes substantial amounts of carbon and root matter to the soil while providing a protective mulch that guards against erosion.

The *Healthy Soil Biomass Pilot Program* is administered by the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share (MACS) Program and funded by the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund. For more information, farmers should contact their local soil conservation district or the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program at 410-841-5864.

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