



Request for Proposals for Farmer-Led Innovations in Cover Cropping

Application Due Date: July 15, 2026 at 11:59 PM, EST. If funding remains, proposals will be reviewed on a monthly basis thereafter until all funding is obligated.

The first round of selections will be made by: August 1, 2026.

I. Project Overview/General Information

A. Purpose of Request

The goal of the Farmer-Led Innovations in Cover Cropping project is to improve water quality, soil health, and crop production goals by expanding the acres of cover crops planted in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay watershed, especially those planted after soybeans and planted early. Examples of projects that have previously funded with these and similar resources include: aerial seeding with drones, precision seeders, combine-mounted cover crop seeders, interseeders, and cooperatively shared cover cropping equipment used for specialty crop production systems.

To achieve this goal, Sustainable Chesapeake is collaborating with Virginia Soil Health Coalition partners to incentivize the purchase of innovative cover cropping technologies that reduce time, tractor passes, fuel use, input costs, and/or allow for earlier planting, improved cover crop performance (e.g. emergence, biomass, distribution), or otherwise expand the adoption, soil health, and environmental impact of cover cropping systems.

Note, Sustainable Chesapeake is proposing to pay participating farmers and agribusinesses for the use of innovative technologies to plant cover crops, not for costs associated with planting cover crops. As such, participating farmers will still be eligible for state cost share programs.

B. Timeframe/Anticipated Period of Performance

The project timeframe is August 1, 2026 through December 31, 2028. All eligible project activities must occur within this timeframe.

C. Partners

Sustainable Chesapeake, Virginia No-Till Alliance (VANTAGE), Virginia Tech, Virginia Soil Health Coalition, and Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

D. Funding Amount and Source

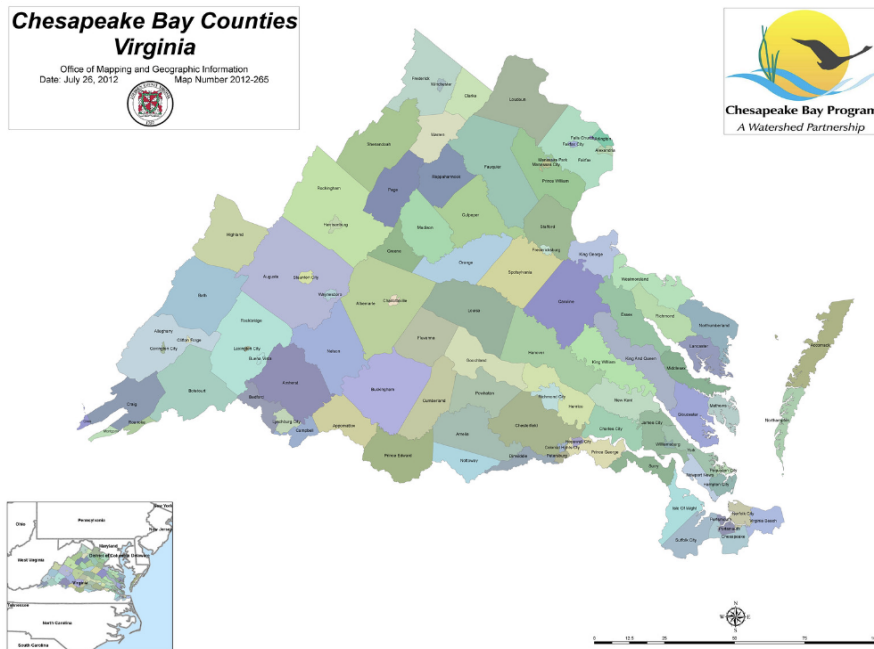
We anticipate approximately \$268,000 in total funding will be available. This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Environmental Protection Agency via an agreement with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.¹

Additionally, participating farmers may be eligible to enroll in the Farmers for Soil Health USDA Advancing Markets for Producers program. For more information, see <https://farmersforsoilhealth.com/>

II. Scope of Work

A. Geographic eligibility:

Farm fields enrolled in the project must be located within the Virginia Chesapeake Bay watershed.



¹ The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the U.S. Government or the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and its funding sources. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the U.S. Government, or the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation or its funding sources.

Figure 1. Map showing the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Virginia.

B. Farmers/Agribusiness Requirements/Deliverables

Sustainable Chesapeake is seeking proposals from Chesapeake Bay watershed farmers, or agribusinesses that serve Chesapeake Bay watershed farmers, that are willing to invest in innovative technologies or management systems with the potential to expand the adoption of cover crops, especially cover crops following soybeans and cover crops planted early. Specifically, we are seeking the following deliverables:

1. **Invest in innovative technologies** with strong potential to reduce time and/or fuel use, get cover crops planted earlier in the season, and expand adoption of cover cropping systems, especially after soybeans. Applicants will receive reimbursable payments, on a per acre basis, for using the equipment. Funding cannot be used to cover direct costs for equipment. Technologies that help farmers implement cover crops as described by Virginia Agricultural Cost Share program the following practices are a priority:
 - i. [SL-8](#) Protective Cover for Specialty Crops
 - ii. [SL-8A](#) Protective Cover for Agricultural Cropland
 - iii. [SL-8B](#) Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management
 - iv. [SL-8H](#) Harvestable Cover Crop
 - v. [SL-8M](#) Small Grain and Mixed Cover Crop for Nutrient Management and Residue Management with Fall Manure Application
 - vi. [WQ-4](#) Legume Based Cover Crop

Technologies that are not proposed for VACS cover crop implementation must demonstrate similar (or better) potential for nutrient reduction.

2. Collaborate with Sustainable Chesapeake and project partners to **track implementation, monitor performance, and share results** with other farmers and conservation professionals at field day events and farmer meetings, etc. Participating farmers must also be willing to work with Sustainable Chesapeake and project partners to ensure cover crop acres are credited towards Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan goals.
3. **Manage all acres enrolled in the project according to a Virginia Nutrient Management Plan** that complies with all requirements set forth in the Nutrient Management Training and Certification Regulations (4VAC50-85 et seq.) and the Virginia Nutrient

Management Standards and Criteria (revised July 2014). The plan must be prepared and certified by a Virginia certified nutrient management planner, and be on file with the local District before any payments can be made to the participant.

4. **Follow insurance requirements (minimums).** Please reach out with any questions or concerns regarding these limits. Applicants can build additional costs for insurance into their proposed per/acre payment rate.

Insurance type	Businesses or Organizations	Farmers
Occurrence Liability	\$1,000,000	\$2,000,000
Aggregate Liability	\$2,000,000	N/A
Umbrella Insurance	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Workers Compensation	\$500,000	\$500,000
Auto	\$1,000,000	Commercial - \$1,000,000* Personal - \$500,000*

Please note the following information regarding drones: Effective December 22, 2025, pursuant to the American Security Drone Act (ASDA), all grantees and contractors expending federal funds are prohibited from using, operating, or purchasing, under any federally funded award, any drone platforms or other uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) that are included on the [Covered Foreign Entities \(CFE\) List](#) due to national security risks.

This prohibition applies to both new purchases and continued use of existing UAS acquired with federal funds and includes, but is not limited to, certain widely used commercial brands, such as DJI and Autel.

All recipients of federal funds are required to review their current UAS inventory and any planned purchases to ensure that no covered systems are used or procured in connection with federally funded activities. A current list of cleared and approved UAS platforms is available [here](#).

If you are currently using UAS or have previously purchased UAS for use under a federally funded award, you must confirm that such systems are not included on this proposal.

Additional information is available at the [Defense Innovation Unit website](#) and the [Defense Contract Management Agency](#).

III. Proposal Instructions and Evaluation

A. Proposal Contents

Farmers and agribusinesses supporting farmers managing land in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay watershed are invited to submit proposals that include responses to the following:

1. Please tell us about your farm or agribusiness and your experience with cover cropping systems.
2. How do you plan to expand the adoption of cover crops, particularly after soybeans?
3. Will your proposed strategy reduce labor, time, fuel use, and/or tractor passes? If so, please explain how.
4. Will your proposed strategy lead to cover crops getting planted earlier than otherwise? If so, please explain how.
5. Are you willing to share information about your project with other farmers, agribusinesses, and conservation professionals? If you have experience in sharing information through farmer meetings, field day events, field trials, or social media, please tell us about your prior efforts to share information.
6. Are you willing to manage participating fields according to your certified nutrient management plan?
7. What payment rate per acre would you need to implement the project? How many acres would you propose to enroll? Please justify.
8. Are you able to receive funding on a reimbursable basis? We are proposing to pay farmers to plant cover crops using innovative technologies, rather than paying for the purchase of innovative technologies directly.
9. Are you proposing to purchase new equipment or use equipment you already have?
10. Do you or your clients meet historically underserved status as defined by NRCS? (socially disadvantaged, beginning, limited resource, and veteran farmers). See here for more information: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers>

11. For agribusinesses, please tell us about your client base and explain your qualifications (experience, equipment, etc.) to implement the project on your clients' farms.
12. Please provide contact information and the best method to contact you with further questions.

B. General Process

Sustainable Chesapeake and partners will evaluate and assess submitted proposals according to the following criteria: the likelihood of success and the likelihood the technology will be transferable to other farming operations. Sustainable Chesapeake reserves the right to accept or reject responses on any basis it deems appropriate.

C. Selection Criteria

The point system detailed below will be used to assist Sustainable Chesapeake and partners in making awards. This point system will not be the only determining factor in the selection process but will play a large role in determining the agribusinesses and farmers that are the best fit to meet the requirements.

1. Likelihood of success in expanding adoption of cover crops, especially after soybeans or on farms new to cover crops (40 points)
2. Likelihood the technology will be transferable to other farming operations (e.g. cost-effectiveness, practical application, ease of use, etc.) (35 points)
3. Cost-effectiveness of the technology/proposal (25 points)

Total potential score: 100 points

IV. Submission

A. Questions

Potential applicants are welcome to reach out with any additional questions to Kristen Hughes Evans (804-554-3403 or info@susches.org)

B. Deadline and submission requirements

1. Please submit (1) hard copy of the proposal by mail (address below) OR (1) electronic copy to info@susches.org.

By mail:

Sustainable Chesapeake
c/o Kristen Hughes Evans
2918 Springhill Ave.
Richmond, VA. 23225

2. Submissions should be 10 pages or less (5 single-sided, 10 double-sided).
3. All submissions shall be *received* by **July 15, 2026 at 11:59 PM, EST**. Notifications of awards are anticipated by August 1, 2026.

C. Freedom of Information Act Disclosure

All documents submitted to Sustainable Chesapeake related to this RFP may be subject to requirements of the Freedom of Information Act and may be deemed public records.

D. No Discrimination

All applicants will be afforded the full opportunity to submit qualifications and will not be discriminated against on any grounds in consideration for award.

E. Reservation

Sustainable Chesapeake reserves the right to accept or reject a proposal without a stated cause. Further, Sustainable Chesapeake reserves the right to terminate, restructure, or amend the stated process at any time. If no proposals are satisfactory, Sustainable Chesapeake has the right to re-issue or cancel the RFP.