



For Immediate Release

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Aerial Applicators Seeding Cover Crops, Nourishing Soil This Late Summer and Early Fall

ALEXANDRIA, VA – August 11, 2025 – While farm fields will soon be harvested and the farm season begins to wind down, aerial applicators are still working by seeding cover crops via aircraft. You may continue to hear the hum of an aircraft's engine this fall. One of the most promising conservation practices aerial applicators can assist farmers with is aerially applying cover crop seeds, which are grasses, legumes, small grains, and other low-maintenance crops planted specifically to improve soil health and biodiversity.

Growing cover crops increases soil carbon sequestration, which involves removing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Aerial applicators seed 3.8 million acres of cover crops annually, which means they are responsible for helping to sequester 1.9 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent annually. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), this would be the equivalent of removing approximately 412,000 cars with carbon-combustion engines from the roads each year.

“Fast-growing cover crops help anchor the soil, shielding it from erosion caused by wind, rain and melting snow,” said Andrew D. Moore, chief executive officer of NAAA. “By reducing soil loss and runoff, they contribute to cleaner water by limiting sediment in waterways.”

Cover crops are important to farmlands because they control erosion; nourish, retain and recycle soil nutrients; build organic matter and add hydration to improve soil health; improve water quality; and break disease and insect cycles. The roots of the cover crops improve soil structure by creating passages that allow for increased moisture and aeration. Soil compaction is essentially eliminated when seeding is done aerially due to the application being made above the crop, not in the crop.

In addition, aerial applications enable the spread of cover crop seeds over the existing cash crop without disrupting the standing crop, allowing the cover crop to start growing before the cash crop is harvested. Using a terrestrial vehicle delays the grower from planting until their cash crop is out of the field. Ground seeding may not offer the best timing for establishing a larger, healthy cover crop, which can be less than ideal, especially in the northern regions of the U.S., where early frost can hinder cover crop growth if seeding is delayed. Aerial application can also be used when the soil is wet, allowing for the quick seeding of many acres. Farmers using climate-smart agricultural conservation practices, such as no-till and cover cropping, may be eligible for the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Conservation Technical Assistance producer-led grants and cost-share programs.

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The National Agricultural Aviation Association (NAAA) represents the interests of the 1,560 small businesses in the U.S., whose owners and pilots are licensed as professional commercial aerial applicators that use aircraft to enhance food, fiber, and biofuel production, protect forestry and control health-threatening pests. For more information, please visit AgAviation.org.