



For Immediate Release

Contact Name: Lindsay Barber, CMP

Phone: (202) 546-5722

Email: Lbarber@agaviation.org

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

ALEXANDRIA, VA – August 25, 2026 – 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 help sequester 1.9 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent. 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 hold soil in place, protecting it from erosion caused by wind, rain and melting snow," said NAAA President Matt Woolard. "They also help improve water quality by reducing soil runoff and keeping sediment out of streams, rivers and other waterways."

Cover crops provide numerous benefits for farmland by controlling erosion, retaining and recycling soil nutrients, building organic matter, adding moisture to improve soil health, improving water quality, and helping break disease and insect cycles. Their roots improve soil structure by creating channels that increase water infiltration and soil aeration. When cover crops are applied by air, soil compaction is avoided because the seed is distributed from above the crop rather than by equipment traveling through the field.

In addition, aerial application allows cover crop seed to be spread over a standing cash crop without disturbing it, giving the cover crop a head start before harvest. In contrast, ground seeding typically requires waiting until the cash crop has been harvested, shortening the growing window. This can be especially challenging in northern regions of the U.S., where an early frost may limit cover crop establishment if planting is delayed. Aerial application also allows seeding to continue when soils are too wet for ground equipment, enabling growers to cover large acreages quickly and efficiently. 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.

###

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.