

JB PRITZKER, GOVERNOR · JERRY COSTELLO II, DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 25, 2026

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IDOA LAUNCHES I-COVER PROGRAM

Pre-enrollment opens April 1, with opportunity to apply April 15

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) is relaunching the Infield Conservation for Operationalizing Vital Ecosystem Resilience (I-COVER) Program to promote the early establishment of cover crops using new techniques and/or technology.

IDOA secured a \$7 million USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant to launch the program, which offers cost-share/financial incentives to producers and landowners who are new adopters of cover crops or who utilize new techniques for earlier establishment of cover crops. I-COVER is a three-year program for cover crops planted in 2026, 2027, and 2028.

The program was paused last summer out of an abundance of caution to protect the financial interests of farmers as federal funding was mired in uncertainty. IDOA refused to ask farmers to invest in the I-COVER program without knowing definitively that they would be reimbursed.

State officials have since worked with USDA NRCS to re-open this critical program, continuing the state’s commitment to soil health initiatives. All applicants who applied under the previous program period will be required to submit a new application to be considered for funding.

“Research shows cover crops strengthen soil health, reduce erosion, improve resilience during drought, and help manage pests, weeds and diseases,” **said Jerry Costello II, Illinois Director of Agriculture.** “This program incentivizes farmers to protect and preserve Illinois soil, which is among the most fertile in the world.”

Pre-enrollment and applications are available online. Visit the IDOA website at agr.illinois.gov/ and select the I-COVER Program link on the home page.

Pre-Enrollment Opens	8 a.m. CDT, Wednesday, April 1, 2026
Program Opens (Applications can be submitted)	8 a.m. CDT, Wednesday, April 15, 2026

Program Closes	11:59 p.m. CDT, Friday, May 1, 2026
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The following rates will be available to selected applications for the following practice scenarios for each of the three years of the program. Scenario rates vary based on species number and type.

- \$61.13/acre for one or more cover crop species, winter killed
- \$85.65/acre for single cover crop species, spring terminated
- \$105.40/acre for one or more cover crop species, spring terminated

IDOA will select applications on a first-come, first-served basis per county, such that the first application per county will be prioritized, pending qualification and verification. If there are remaining program funds after the first application per county is verified, the second application per county will be prioritized, pending qualification and verification, and so on.

IDOA may establish and implement an acreage cap, if needed, to accommodate at least one application per county. IDOA will verify applications and respective acreage, and local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff will check selected applicants' USDA Farm Bill eligibility, work with applicants on conservation planning, verify practice implementation, and assist with payment and reporting documents. Program viability is subject to availability of federal funds.

A copy of the CCC-902, FSA Subsidiary Report and Producer Farm Data or proof of control of the land will be needed, if the applicant is selected.

Acres must not be currently enrolled in other state, federal, or private programs that use state or federal funds to implement cover crops from late summer/fall 2026 through 2028 (e.g. EQIP, CSP, Fall Covers for Spring Savings or any other program that may include state or federal funds) and applicants must have control of the land for the life of the program.

For program details, visit the I-COVER Program Rules at agr.illinois.gov/resources/landwater/i-cover.html or contact IDOA by email at agr.icover@Illinois.gov or by phone at (217) 782-6297.

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