



**Agriculture
and Markets**



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**

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For Immediate Release: November 21, 2018

**NEW YORK STATE ANNOUNCES FUNDING TO PROTECT WATER QUALITY AND
SOIL HEALTH AROUND CAYUGA, OWASCO, SKANEATELES AND
OTISCO LAKES**

Cover Crop Initiative Safeguards Watershed in Eastern Finger Lakes Region

Builds on \$3.3 Million in Cover Crop Investments Statewide Since 2010

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today announced nearly \$300,000 in funding for the Eastern Finger Lakes Cover Crop Initiative. The initiative, which is being funded through the Environmental Protection Fund, will help farmers use cover crops to reduce erosion and protect water quality in and around Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles and Otisco lakes. New York State Soil and Water Conservation Districts will work with farms in Seneca, Tompkins, Cayuga, Onondaga and Cortland counties to implement cover crop projects.

Agriculture and Markets Commissioner Richard A. Ball said, “This project assists our farmers in the eastern Finger Lakes area who are committed to environmental stewardship of the land and to protecting our valuable resources. Cover crops are an excellent way to protect the watershed and benefit farmers by enriching and improving the soil. We are pleased to be working in partnership with the DEC and our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, who will provide the technical assistance to landowners on this initiative.”

DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said, "Clean water is critical to the health and safety of our communities and New York State's economic prosperity. Few groups understand the critical importance of conserving our natural resources better than New York's farmers. With Governor Cuomo's leadership, and backed by the power of a fully

funded EPF and the strong support provided by our County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Cover Crop Initiative will help New York's agricultural community safeguard our water resources and sustain agricultural operations across the state."

Under this project, \$285,000 will be used to promote the use of cover crops in the eastern Finger Lakes, including \$180,000 to help farmers plant the crops and \$105,000 to help offset the costs of specialized equipment used for planting.

Common cover crops in New York State include rye, oats, wheat, radishes, peas, clover and sunflowers. The crops, which are typically planted in late fall following the harvest of traditional plantings, improve soil health for the spring. Cover crops also help reduce erosion and runoff, absorb excess nutrients, filter surface water and ground water, add organic matter to soil, reduce weeds, combat pests and sequester carbon dioxide emissions in the soil. Cover crops are an excellent best management practice which promotes soil health and protects water quality.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts from Seneca, Tompkins, Cayuga, Onondaga and Cortland counties will use the state's Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) framework to plan, implement and evaluate projects. Funding will be made available to farms to incorporate cover cropping into their annual cash crop planting systems. For farmers who are interested in learning more about cover crop implementation, please contact a local county Soil and Water Conservation District at https://www.nys-soilandwater.org/contacts/county_offices.html.

The initiative began in January 2018 and 541 acres of cover crops have been planted so far. The crops are marked with [new signs](#) designating them a part of the Eastern Finger Lakes Cover Crop Initiative.

State Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker said, "We all have a responsibility to do our part to protect water quality for the benefit of public health. Our agricultural partners are on the frontlines of land stewardship and safeguarding our natural resources that impact the water we receive at the tap. We encourage farmers in the Finger Lakes region to take advantage of the Cover Crop Initiative to aid New York's drinking water quality efforts and enhance their overall operations."

State Soil and Water Conservation District Committee Chair Dale Stein said, "I am very excited about DEC's funding of cover crops in the eastern Finger Lakes. Cover crops are one of the leading ways that farmers can protect water quality. By having a growing crop on the fields as close as possible to 12 months a year, runoff is greatly reduced, and the cover crop takes up excess nutrients to protect our world-renowned water resource in the Finger Lakes."

The Eastern Finger Lakes Cover Crop Initiative builds on the State's efforts to safeguard natural resources. At the direction of Governor Cuomo, New York State has been working with Soil and Water Conservation Districts as well as Cornell Cooperative

Extension to build and expand farmer-led soil health coalitions and promote policy changes to improve the health of the State's land and water.

The State's Agricultural Nonpoint Source and Abatement Control Grant Program and its Climate Resilient Farming Program also promote the use of cover crops on farms. Since 2010, these programs have funded \$3.3 million for 268 landowners who contributed \$1.7 million in cost-sharing funds for cover crops across more than 36,000 acres of New York State farmland.



Caption: Sunflowers being used as a cover crop along with red clover.



Caption: Field tillage radish cover crop incorporated with winter wheat. The tillage radish breaks up soil compaction.