South Illinois Region S.T.A.R. Program –2018 Crop Year

Application instructions, definitions, and (FAQ) Frequently Asked Questions

1. **How do I submit my application?**
   It is recommended that you complete the application with your computer or phone, save it, and email it to the provided address. You can also submit a hard copy application by U.S. Mail.

2. **Should I mark something on each section of the Field Form?**
   Yes, it is very important to mark EACH section to clarify what was done or not done on that **PARTICULAR FIELD!!**

3. **Why is my contact information needed?**
   Once your field is rated, we need to contact you to let you know the results and to offer a field sign for posting.

4. **What is the definition of the "Crop Year?"**
   The time frame of the evaluation and rating should begin the day after Fall 2017 harvest through the end of harvest of 2018. The deadline to submit applications for the 2018 Crop Year is March 1, 2019.

5. **How will my answers to the form(s) be verified?**
   Your county's Soil & Water Conservation Districts Resource Conservationist will typically have enough knowledge of any farm to know if there are inconsistencies. The Wabash Valley Stewardship Alliance will use random sampling to conduct a check of up to 10% of the fields each year. Hence the need for the field location information that allows the use of a plat book to find the field.

6. **Who will know my S.T.A.R. rating(s)?**
   We will not advertise your rating(s) or inform anyone but you. You will be encouraged to post your optional field sign(s). The information collected on a field will be placed into a "Farm Folder" held by the Wabash Valley Stewardship Alliance. As a private entity, your information is not subject to FOIA requests.

7. **Is a post provided with the sign?**
   No

8. **Why am I asked to sign the form?**
   This simply reminds the participant to be careful to complete the form as accurately as possible.

9. **Section 9 Explanation**
   A cover crop credited for the 2018 Crop Year must have been planted in the Fall of 2017 and "established," which means it must have had "some" growth before spring planting. It is best to use "winter hardy" species, including Annual Ryegrass, Cereal Rye, and Winter Wheat. "Established" means the cover crop was planted "in a timely matter and when there is adequate moisture to establish a good stand" (based on the NRCS Practice Standard Code 340). Planting dates for the likelihood of "adequate" establishment will vary by the species and the geographical location. A great resource for this topic is the Midwest Cover Crops Council website: www.mccc.msu.edu

10. **How do I record my cover crop species?**
    Mark all species of cover crop plants used for this crop year (planted in the fall of 2017). If the cover crop you are utilizing is not listed, write it/them under "Other species." Using more than one species is best.

11. **Section 10 Explanation**
    Only mark "Fall" or "Spring" because the form is for only one field. It is better to sample in the spring and it is better to sample more often (implies better management decisions).

12. **How do I know if my sampling was done with GPS?** If your sampling is done by a soil testing or related service firm, it is VERY likely done using GPS. However, a grid or zone sizes should be based on the University of IL Agronomy Handbook:extension.cropsciences.illinois.edu/handbook/

13. **Section 11 Explanation**
    If NH3 (anhydrous ammonium = 82-0-0) is used, it should be applied when the temperature is below 50 degrees and you should use an inhibitor. It is recommended that NH3 will be no more than 50% of the total Nitrogen Program as higher levels are subject to nitrogen loss from your field. From an environmental perspective, it is best if NO Nitrogen or Phosphorus are applied at all. However, if Nitrogen is applied, it is best done in the spring and/or summer.

14. **Section 11 Explanation**
    It is okay to use MAP (11-52-0) or DAP (18-46-0) in the fall before December 1st as it actually is good IF there is also a "winter hardy" cover crop being used. The amount of N in the MAP or DAP is rather insignificant but will help the cover crop become established and grow.

15. **Section 11 Explanation**
    Manure applications are used to replace other forms of nutrients. It is much better to apply in the spring when there is less likelihood of any leaching or runoff and management of such applications should be balanced with soil tests and what exactly is being added by the manure. Use of manure counts as adding a somewhat significant level of Nitrogen. It is important to include a stabilizer when applying manure.

16. **Section 12 Explanation**
    As stated earlier, Nitrogen applications are best done in the spring and/or summer. It is a best management practice to side-dress some (not all) of the nitrogen on corn. It is important to include a stabilizer when applying manure.

17. **Section 13 Explanation**
    The amount of Nitrogen identified here is based on the maintenance needs for normal yield goals in southeastern Illinois. The recommendation is to apply less than 175 pounds on a field with a corn and soybean rotation. If those guidelines are followed, there would be limited denitrification and leaching losses. The continuous corn rotation allows more Nitrogen (less than 200 pounds per acre) because soybeans were not used to "credit" some Nitrogen to that field.

    It would be even better to follow the guidelines of the "Corn N-Rate Calculator" that is a part of the NRCS 590 Nutrient Management standards and specifications, found at this link to Iowa State University http://cnrc.agron.iastate.edu. That system uses current corn and nitrogen prices to calculate the MRTN (Maximum Return To Nitrogen).

18. **Section 13 Explanation**

If Phosphorus is applied either in the fall or spring, it is best to be banded subsurface (incorporated). Triple Super is much better than MAP or DAP but adding NO phosphorus would help meet the "Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy."

19. **Section 13 Explanation**

If Nitrogen or Phosphorus (including manure) is broadcast on either frozen ground OR on snow covered ground, that would be **VERY BAD**. Even worse would be application of nutrients on frozen ground that also has snow on it.

20. **Section 14 Explanation**

Crop rotation is better than a continuous crop of any kind, but continuous soybeans is better than continuous corn. Better yet, include a forage, such as alfalfa or clover, or a small grain, such as wheat.

21. **Section 15 Explanation**

A major concern about soil loss, and therefore nutrient loss, is the amount of residue on the soil at any time. The type of tillage used is a simple method to estimate the amount of residue on a field and much easier than trying to ask the operator to measure it or do an estimate. Fewer passes and shallower tillage are best. However, if a cover crop is planted or manure is applied in the fall, a shallow tillage operation to incorporate has some benefit. Ideally, everyone would use no-till or strip-till to prevent erosion.

22. **Section 16 Explanation**

This section includes many very positive conservation practices. Most of the items on the list are self-explanatory if they are pertinent, but should only be checked if it fits the field being evaluated. The first six items on the list should only be checked if they are <u>still functioning as intended</u>.

"On-site agronomic trial" = Any study done on THAT field that may include variety comparisons, use of N-TRACK, use of N-WATCH, taking tissue and plant samples and having them analyzed, or any other study done to improve your cropping decisions. Trials done on a different field do not apply.

"Attended soil or nutrient management meeting" may have been any meeting that includes some discussion or recommendations related to soil, nutrient use, or cover crops, including field days, no matter the length of time. It should have been within the past year at the time of completing the form.

23. **Section 17 Explanation**

In southeastern Illinois, with our variable slopes and high potential for soil erosion, it is not recommended to spray for weeds after harvest, but to allow the weeds to help control erosion until spring.