



**Florida Organic Growers and SE TOPP**

**Present:**

# **Organic Cover Crop**

# **101**

## **Southern Cover Crop Conference**

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
**Feb 25, 2026**  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



# Overview of Cover Crops and NOP Requirements

## Role of Cover Crops

Cover crops improve soil health, fertility, help in the management of pests.

## NOP Regulatory Requirements

Section 205.205 of the organic regulations includes cover crops as part of crop rotations.

## Agronomic Benefits in Southeast

Cover crops reduce erosion, enhance soil organic matter, and support nutrient cycles.

## Cover Crop Species

Common cover crops include rye, crimson clover, sunn hemp, and cowpeas.



# Cover Crops in Florida and the Southeast

## Challenges

Sandy soils cause nutrient loss, pest pressure, and soil degradation.

## Benefits of Cover Crops

Cover crops increase organic matter, reduce erosion, and improve moisture infiltration in soil.

## Species Selection

Regionally adapted species like sunn hemp ensure strong biomass and soil protection.

## Organic Compliance

Cover crops support biodiversity, reduce inputs, suppress weeds, and meet USDA organic program standards.



# Weed and Pest Suppression

## Weed Suppression by Cover Crops

Dense cover crop stands create shade, compete for nutrients, and leave residues that act as natural mulches to suppress weeds.

## Allelopathic Species Effects

Cover crops like sorghum-sudangrass release allelopathic compounds that inhibit weed germination, reducing mechanical tillage needs.

## Pest and Disease Mitigation

Cover crops interrupt pest habitats and support beneficial insects, enhancing biological control and reducing soilborne diseases.

## Organic Compliance and Soil Health

Using cover crops aligns with organic regulations, reducing external inputs and promoting soil conservation and ecosystem balance.



# Key NOP Regulations Related to Cover Crops

## **NOP Organic System Plan**

Cover crops are integral to the organic system plan required by NOP to promote ecological balance and soil quality.

## **Crop Rotation and Soil Fertility**

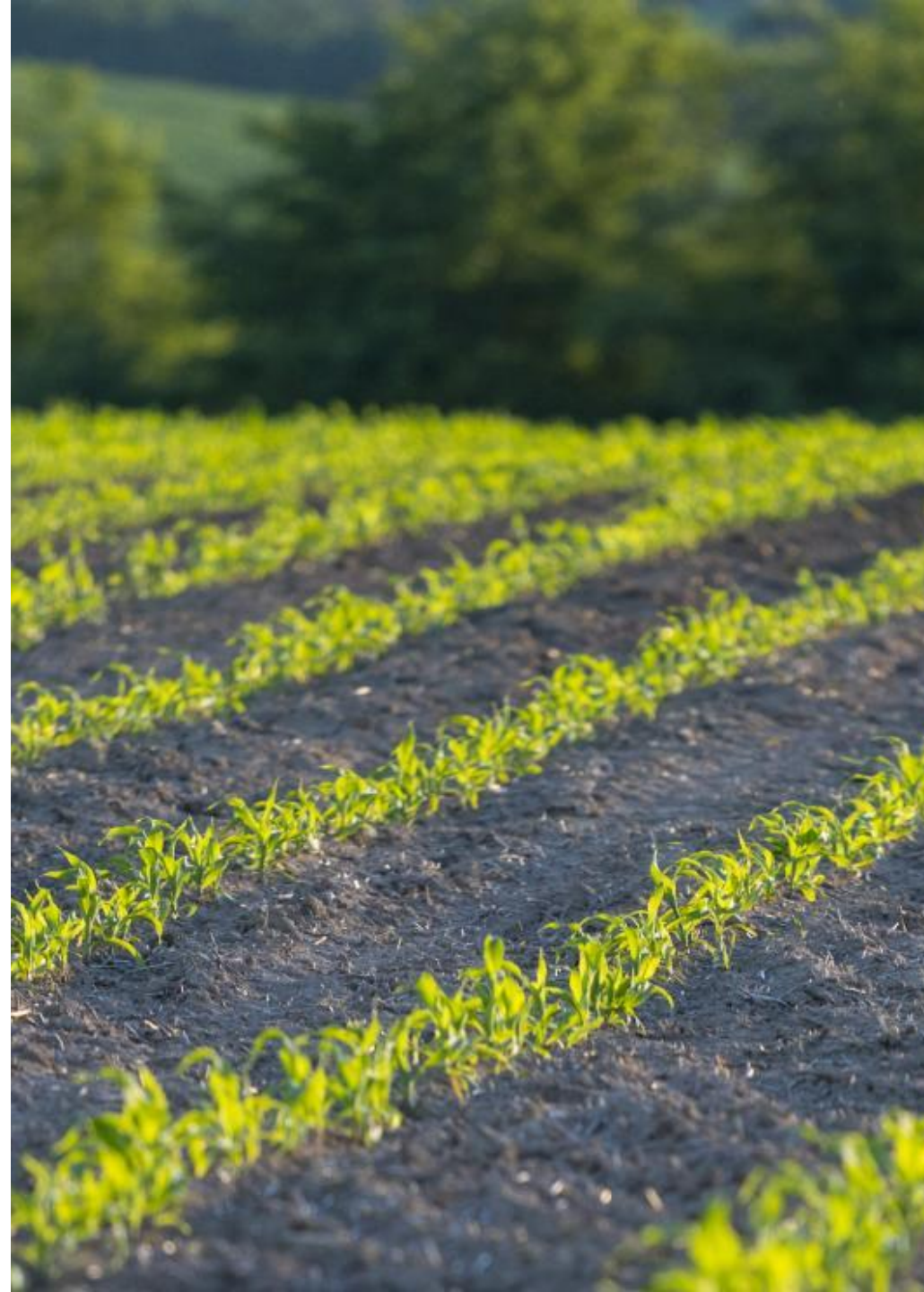
NOP mandates crop rotations with cover crops to enhance soil fertility, reduce erosion, and manage pests naturally.

## **Prohibited Inputs and Soil Health**

Synthetic fertilizers and persistent herbicides are prohibited, emphasizing high-biomass cover crops for soil organic matter.

## **Documentation and Compliance**

Producers must document cover crop details in the organic system plan for certifier compliance assessments.\



# Summary of Cover Crop Benefits and Organic Compliance

## **Soil Health Improvement**

Cover crops increase organic matter, microbial activity, and soil structure to meet soil conservation standards.

## **Nutrient and Moisture Management**

Cover crops aid nutrient cycling, nitrogen fixation, and improve moisture retention without synthetic fertilizers.

## **Pest and Weed Control**

Cover crops provide habitat for beneficial insects, disrupt pest cycles, and suppress weeds naturally.

## **NOP Compliance and Education**

Cover crops help farmers meet NOP requirements using USDA and NRCS resources for sustainable farming.



# Adopting Organic Compliant Strategies

## **NOP Compliance Benefits**

Cover cropping supports ecological balance, biodiversity, and soil conservation for NOP compliance.

## **USDA NRCS Support Programs**

USDA NRCS offers financial aid, conservation planning, and guidance to help farmers adopt cover crops.

## **Community and Knowledge Sharing**

Engagement with extension agents, service providers, grower organizations, certifiers helps customize and improve farm practices.





# Organic Transition Initiative (OTI) Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) Regions



This map shows many of the organizations helping to establish the TOPP partnership network (October 2022)



# SE TOPP

Alabama  
**States**

Florida

Georgia

Louisiana

Mississippi

North Carolina

Puerto Rico

South Carolina



# Southeast Transition to Organic Partnership Program (SE TOPP)

## 5 Key Programmatic Areas:

- Farmer to Farmer Mentorship
- Community Building
- Technical Assistance and Training
- Data Collection
- Workforce Training and Development

Learn more about SE TOPP  
Southeast - Transition to Organic  
Partnership Program  
([organictransition.org](http://organictransition.org))



# What does TOPP Cover?

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## TOPP covers 5 areas:

- Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring
- Community Building
- Technical Assistance and Training
- Data Collection and Reporting
- Workforce Training and Development

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
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Transition to Organic Partnership Program



# TOPP Website and Resources

[www.organictransition.org](http://www.organictransition.org)



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## Let's Go Organic

**The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP)** is a network assembled by the USDA's National Organic Program to support transitioning and organic producers with mentorship and resources.

# Lean More on the TOPP Website



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# Resources

- [Transition to Organic Partnership Program Website](#)
- [Florida Organic Growers Website](#)
- [USDA Organic Regulations](#)
- [National Organic Program Handbook: Guidance and Instructions](#)
- [Transitional Production Plan](#)
- [Organic Transitioning](#)
- [Organic Training](#)
- [Organic Integrity Database](#)

# Questions?

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Learn more about SETOPP:

[https://www.organictransition.org/  
region/southeast](https://www.organictransition.org/region/southeast)



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