

# Incentives for Delayed Haying & Summer Pasture Stockpiling

Credit: Hugh Kenny/PEC

## What is the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative?

Native grasslands have suffered more intense impact by humans than any other North American terrestrial ecosystem, and remaining grassland birds have now adapted to using hayfields and pasturelands as surrogate habitat. Grassland bird conservation, therefore, falls largely on private landowners and farmers in particular. Through the launch of the Piedmont Grassland Bird Initiative (PGBI), our organizations have partnered together to address the ongoing decline of grassland bird populations in Virginia. PGBI works with producers to implement a suite of best management practices on working landscapes to accomplish the following goals: **1. stem the tide of grassland bird decline, 2. improve the resiliency of working landscapes, and 3. positively impact the livelihoods that depend upon those lands.**

## Incentives Program

With funding support from the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative, PGBI offers monetary incentive payments to farmers willing to adopt one (or both) of the following best management practices, which encourage an abundance and diversity of bird species. Birds provide important ecosystem services that directly improve the long-term resiliency of working landscapes.

### Delayed Haying

**How it works:** Delay the first spring cutting of hay on select fields until July 15 or later and withhold livestock, tractor/UTV activity, and other disturbances such as herbicide and fertilizer applications during this time.

**Benefits:** Allows producers to strategically spread out labor requirements and could lead to potential for marketing farm and products as bird friendly. Higher fiber, more mature hay is suitable for feeding dry cows, horses, and retired animals, as well as for mushroom hay and bedding. Land stays eligible for agricultural land use tax deferral.

### Summer Pasture Stockpiling

**How it works:** Rotate cattle off select fields by April 15 and withhold livestock, tractor/UTV activity, mowing, and other disturbances such as herbicide and fertilizer applications until August 1 or later.

**Benefits:** Bridges the summer dormancy gap by providing standing forage in late summer without the risk and cost of planting summer annuals. Provides the opportunity to rest and prepare other fields for fall/winter stockpiling with the goal of reducing hay feeding days and annual feed cost.

Price per acre will be based on a combination of fair market value and conservation value.



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# Eligible Counties

Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange, Rappahannock, and Warren

## Site Selection

Most grassland bird species require wide expanses of grasses for nesting, so acreage that best mimics a large, contiguous patch of grass, distant from thick forest edges and human development, is best suited for this incentive program. Here are some habitat characteristics to consider when selecting fields and/or pastures:

- **Size:** 10 or more acres are preferred. Producers who can designate 25 acres or more will receive a higher score on their application.
- **Shape:** Square or rectangle fields are preferred over long, narrow fields, fields with many twists and turns, and fields with patches of shrubs or trees throughout.
- **Surroundings:** Fields surrounded by other hay fields or pastures are preferred over those bordered by forest or development.

Applicants should consider pairing summer stockpiling fields with adjoining hay/pasture fields that are managed to protect the spring/early summer nesting season for grassland birds. An application will score higher if more contiguous acreage can be combined.

## Field Suitability



**High (Green):** Large (more than 10 acres), square or rectangular shape, open grasses, connected to other fields, few or no forested borders.

**Medium (Yellow):** Long and narrow or irregular shape, some forested borders, some connectivity with other fields. These fields may be considered if grassland birds are present.

**Low (Red):** Small (less than 10 acres), long and narrow or irregular shape, patches of trees within, most or all forested borders, no connectivity with other fields.

## How to Participate

1. Reach out to PGBI Co-coordinator October Greenfield by email at [ogreenfield@pecva.org](mailto:ogreenfield@pecva.org) or by phone at (540) 347-2334 x7051.
2. A team member will schedule a time to visit your property to discuss the program in detail and assess your fields and/or pastures for compatibility.
3. Visit [vagrasslandbirds.org](http://vagrasslandbirds.org) for more resources, upcoming events, and the latest news.



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