

Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative

Incentives for Delayed Haying & Summer Pasture Stockpiling

Credit: Hugh Kenny/PEC

What is the Virginia 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 Virginia Grassland Bird Initiative (VGBI), The Piedmont Environmental Council, Smithsonian's Virginia Working Landscapes, American Farmland Trust, and Quail Forever have partnered together to address the ongoing decline of grassland bird populations in Virginia. VGBI 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, VGBI is excited to offer 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 resiliency of working landscapes. *Note: Price per acre will be based on a combination of fair market value and conservation value.*

Delayed Haying

How it works: Delay the first spring cutting of hay on select fields until July 1 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 July 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.



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VGBI's financial incentives program targets farmers interested in adopting delayed spring haying and/or summer pasture stockpiling into their long-term production goals but who might be hesitant about the financial risks involved. VGBI offsets the initial costs of piloting these best management practices so farmers can eventually make a full transition.

Eligible Counties

Albemarle, Augusta, Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Frederick, Greene, Loudoun, Madison, Orange, Page, Prince William, Rappahannock, Rockingham, Shenandoah, 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:** 20 or more acres are preferred.
- **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.

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 VGBI Co-coordinator October Greenfield by email at ogreenfield@pecva.org or by phone at (540) 347-2334 x7051. A team member will then schedule a site visit.
2. Visit vagrasslandbirds.org/incentives for more resources.



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