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Export date: Fri Mar 29 4:44:04 2024 / +0000 GMT

Farmers work to protect grasslands birds

Credit Valley Conservation's (CVC) Bird-Friendly Certified Hay (BFCH) program continues to successfully protect grassland birds and is a viable choice for farmers.

Last year marked the third year of the program. Its 28 participants showed how environmental protection and farming are mutually beneficial.

In 2016, there were 14 pairs of grassland birds nesting in bird-friendly certified hay fields and 66 using the fields. The 211 acres enrolled in the program meant that 14 pairs of nesting birds had a better chance of keeping their young alive during their first few weeks of life. Grassland birds such as bobolink and eastern meadowlark breed and make their nests on the ground in grasslands. In the last 10 years, bobolink and eastern meadowlark have experienced population declines of 33 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, due to loss of natural grassland habitat.

?More and more farmers, hay buyers and landowners (are) renting their land want to produce and use products that benefit the environment and help their bottom line,? Mark Eastman, senior coordinator of agricultural outreach at CVC, observed. ?The Bird-Friendly Certified Hay program is the answer.?

Hay growers can connect to hay purchasers, such as the growing local equine community, to sell this niche product on the program's online marketplace www.birdfriendlyhay.ca

?When hay growers, buyers and landowners commit to small changes in growing and buying practices, we see a real difference in the recovery of grassland birds,? CVC's Deputy CAO and Director of Watershed Transformation Mike Puddister said.

Registration is now open for the program. Contact Eastman at 1-800-668-5557 ext. 430 or meastman@creditvalleyca.ca for more information.