

Acton farmer is protecting grassland birds with CVC

An Acton farmer, Geoff Maltby, marked the start of the hay harvest July 15.

Maltby is participating in Credit Valley Conservation's (CVC) Bird-Friendly Certified Hay (BFCH) program, where he agreed to delay the date he cuts hay to protect grassland birds.

Grassland birds, such as bobolink and the 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 the loss of natural grassland habitat.

Late cut hay fields provide suitable alternative habitat for grassland birds.

"Farmers are key partners in conservation," said CVC Deputy CAO and Director of Watershed Transformation Mike Puddister.

"The Bird-Friendly Certified Hay program exemplifies how the farm community is making a real difference in the recovery of grassland birds."

"Since the program began in 2013, over 164 bobolink and eastern meadowlark have been found using the Bird-Friendly Certified Hay fields," he added.

Maltby became involved in the BFCH program when it first started three years ago. He currently has 10 acres enrolled in the program.

"It doesn't make much difference to me to delay cutting my hay field, but for grassland birds, it means they survive," he observed. "I can give you a dozen reasons why to grow bird-friendly certified hay, but not one reason why not."

Being a part of the program made sense for Maltby because he was motivated to protect grassland birds on his farm and by the quality of hay produced to feed his own horses. It was a natural extension to his farming operations and stewardship ethic.

"Farmers participating in the BFCH program are showing that environmental protection and farming are mutually beneficial,"

CVC's Agricultural Extension Program Coordinator Mark Eastman commented.

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

Learn more about growing, selling or purchasing BFCH by contacting Eastman at 1-800-668-5557, ext. 430 or www.birdfriendlyhay.ca



Geoff Maltby, Acton farmer participating in the Bird-Friendly Certified Hay program.