

Bird-friendly hay shows results that are promising after first year

The results are in.

Grassland birds benefit from Bird-Friendly Certified Hay.

Credit Valley Conservation's (CVC) hay certification program has been shown to significantly improve living conditions for at-risk grassland birds. This comes at the end of the first growing season for Bird-Friendly Certified Hay.

The program, now with 14 registered participants, focuses on making productive hay fields more livable for grassland birds that have taken up residence in them. The program has eight registered hay producers who grew 143 acres of Bird-Friendly Certified Hay on nine farms. Conservation authority staff observed at least 78 at-risk grassland birds such as bobolink and eastern meadowlark in the fields and confirmed five breeding pairs.

"This is such an encouraging sign," said CVC Agricultural Program Coordinator Mark Eastman. "Bird-friendly hay is making a big difference and attracting the interest of many hay producers."

Birds like the eastern meadowlark and bobolink are declining in number and are now considered "species at risk" by the Province. Meadow and tallgrass prairie habitat once dotted the landscape across parts of headwaters region (Caledon, Dufferin, Orangeville, Erin and Halton Hills), but were lost due to urban and agricultural development, and reforestation. At present, there is not enough protected contiguous grassland and meadow habitat in the region to sustain a thriving grassland bird population.

Hay production in Southern Ontario has benefitted grassland birds by inadvertently creating habitat for them. This offsets the negative impacts of habitat loss to a limited extent. Unfortunately, typical hay harvesting practices can have devastating impacts on grassland birds and their young. Bird-Friendly Certified Hay is harvested in ways and at specific times of the year to minimize that impact and provide habitat for grassland birds to forage, nest and rest.

"The agricultural community has an important role to play in protecting these birds," said Eastman. "Hay producers that make small changes in the way hay is harvested can have large positive impacts. Grassland birds can thrive in hay fields if bird-friendly agricultural practices are used."

Geoff and Shanna Maltby own a farm near Acton and participated in the program.

"Consumers want farmers to provide healthy and delicious food products and to demonstrate they are stewards of the land," Mr. Maltby said. "Participating in the program shared our farm's commitment to environmental protection. I learned about at-risk grassland birds and I'm happy to provide space for them to nest on my land."

To learn more about Bird-Friendly Certified Hay, visit www.birdfriendlyhay.ca



More hay producers are looking to Bird-Friendly Certified Hay.