

Make bird-friendly hay while sun is shining

Credit Valley Conservation's (CVC) Bird-Friendly Certified Hay program is now accepting registrations.

The program's online marketplace (www.birdfriendlyhay.ca) simplifies the search for farmers looking for land to grow hay and landowners with available land. Once connected through the marketplace, they can negotiate land-use or rental agreements to grow Bird-Friendly Certified Hay.

Participating farmers agree to delay their hay harvest date until July 15 to protect grassland birds. These birds, such as eastern meadowlark and bobolink, nest in hay fields. The program protects grassland birds by giving young birds time to leave the nest before the hay harvest. Grassland bird populations have declined significantly in recent years due to the loss of natural grassland habitat.

Landowners that agree to have farm businesses crop their land may be eligible for a 75 per cent reduction on their property taxes for the acreage.

"My neighbours and I both benefit from the arrangement," Erin farmer and Bird-Friendly Certified Hay program participant Jake Grift observed. "They protect grassland birds and get a tax break, and I can access more land for my farm business."

Since joining the program in 2014, Grift has been able to add Bird-Friendly Certified Hay into the diet rotation for his dairy goats and horses.

"The horses on our farm need lower protein roughage hay and first-cut Bird-Friendly Certified Hay provides this," Grift explained. "It's local, cost-effective and a good feed supplement."

Grift maximizes the use of the Bird-Friendly Certified Hay fields and harvests a second cut in August or September. The late-season hay has the high protein level that his lactating dairy goats need.

"Participants in the program protect farmland, create opportunities for local farm businesses and help grassland birds," CVC's Agricultural Outreach Senior Coordinator Mark Eastman said.

For more information, contact Eastman at 1-800-668-5557 ext. 430 or meastman@creditvalleyca.ca