



Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust
GRASSLAND SET-ASIDES:
Program Overview & Guidelines

The Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust (DF&WT) Grassland Set-aside agreements are established with co-operators for a period of *one to four years*.

Purpose of the Grassland Set-aside Program

DF&WT Grassland Set-asides have benefited soil and conserved wildlife habitat on the Fraser River Delta for over a decade. Co-operators should view Grassland Set-asides as an opportunity to improve soil structure and organic matter, while simultaneously providing important habitat for wildlife.

Wildlife habitat values include dense grass cover, encouraging the establishment of small mammal populations as prey for raptors and providing foraging areas, roosting and nesting sites for a variety of wildlife. A mixture of coarse and fine grasses and varying grass management practices (cutting, fertility inputs, etc.) provides habitat diversity for a wide range of species. Ideally, the grass seed mixture used to establish a set-aside should:

- **provide low maintenance requirements;**
- **enhance soil organic matter and structure;**
- **establish good vegetative cover for foraging, roosting and nesting wildlife; and**
- **be relatively inexpensive.**

Small mammals such as shrews, deer mice and voles have shown some preferences for all the grasses selected for the DF&WT Grassland Set-aside mix (described below). Orchardgrass has also been reported to harbor beneficial insects such as ladybird beetles. Waterfowl use of Grassland Set-asides is particularly evident in first year set-asides as they graze on shoots during the winter months.

Upon degraded or very wet lowland soils, both Timothy and Tall Fescue establish well. Tall Fescue, Orchardgrass and Timothy have been shown to enhance soil organic matter, with Tall Fescue and clover providing the most benefits to improving soil structure. Tall Fescue is tolerant of salty and wet field conditions with poor soil surface structure and is therefore of value to sites in need of soil restoration (a grass mix has been developed for sites such as these; contact DF&WT for more information). Both Creeping Red and Chewing's Fescues have good filling in or turf building qualities. The selected mix is also good for haying because it will dry quickly and provide good forage value as feed for livestock.

Outline of Some Grassland Set-Aside Program and Management Conditions

Co-operators are asked to manage Grassland Set-asides in such a way as to promote good grass growth, thus maximizing soil and wildlife benefits.

Eligible Acreage: The maximum allowable acreage per co-operator is limited to the **lesser of 50% of the area they own and/or farm or 50 acres.**

Grass Varieties to be Planted: It is recommended that Grassland Set-asides be seeded with the "DF&WT Grassland Set-aside Mix".

The DF&WT Grassland Set-aside Mix consists of:

- Orchardgrass (25%),
- Tall Fescue (28%),
- Timothy (15%),
- Chewing's Fescue (15%)
- Creeping Red Fescue (15%)and
- Double Cut Red Clover (2%).

Contact the DF&WT office for information on where the seed mix can be obtained

The seed mixture should be planted at 30 lbs/acre with a nurse crop of barley or oats. Producers who do not want to plant a cereal grain nurse crop in the establishment year can add annual ryegrass to the DF&WT Grassland Set-aside Mix to aid in controlling weeds and to enhance wildlife habitat value. This blended seed mixture will need to be planted at about 40 lb/ac. A more salt tolerant mix containing Fult's Alkali Grass is also available.

Planting: For a Grassland Set-aside to be considered for the program, application must be made to DF&WT **before** planting occurs. Grass fields established prior to applying to the program are ineligible for funding. ***Please note that due to limited funding, all fields applied for in any year may not be funded. Applicants may have to wait until the following year, or longer, for funding, although planting may still go ahead at the discretion and expense of the applicant.*** The first year of funding determines the date of entry into the program. Co-operators are encouraged to laser level and undertake surface or sub-surface drainage management activities prior to planting a

Grassland Set-aside if the field is known to have low spots and is prone to extended seasonal flooding. Planting should be ideally completed by the end of May or early June but no later than June 30. All field preparation and seed costs are to be paid by the co-operator.

Soil Fertility: If grass growth becomes slow or stunted, the co-operator will be asked to apply a small amount of manure or fertilizer to the set-aside. If establishment in the first year is deemed, for any reason, to be wholly or partly unsuccessful, soil tests may be conducted, and/or lime applications and/or reseeded may be required. All costs associated with these activities are to be paid by the co-operator.

Establishment Year of Grassland Set-aside: During the establishment year of the Grassland Set-aside, a nurse crop of barley, oats or annual ryegrass is recommended. The nurse crops of barley or oats may be taken to grain or the nurse crop may be harvested as silage or hay, but no other subsequent harvest will be permitted during the establishment year (12 months from the date of planting).

Subsequent Years in Grassland Set-aside: Provided that DF&WT has sufficient funds secured for its Grassland Set-aside Program, the co-operator may remain in the program for a maximum of **four** years. This is conditional upon the field being well maintained with a dense establishment of grass. **Set-asides that are in their last year must be left intact until March 31 of the last contracted year.** Yearly contracts run from April 1 to March 31.

Cutting or Mowing Practices: Some co-operators may be asked by DF&WT to mow part or all of the Set-aside to increase its wildlife habitat value and to control weeds. Under the program, co-operators are also permitted to take a single cut for harvest of hay or silage per year. While cutting or mowing the grass, co-operators are encouraged to:

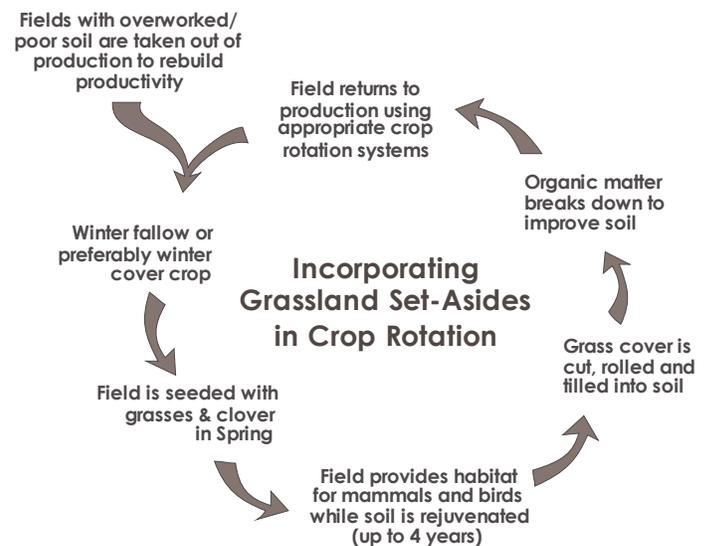
- drive slowly, so that small mammals and other wildlife have some chance of escape;
- to cut from the centre of the field towards the edge, so that small mammals and other wildlife do not become trapped; and

- leave a small uncut field margin, 3-20 ft. wide, around the edges of the field to act as cover for displaced wildlife and beneficial insects.

Mowing or harvest should not occur until after **July 15** to minimize impacts on breeding birds.

Payments to Co-operators: Grassland Set-asides are eligible for a cost share of **\$300/acre/year in the 1st year, \$250/acre/year in the 2nd and 3rd years, and \$300/acre/year in the 4th year.** In all cases where a crop is harvested as grain, grass, hay, straw or silage during any contracted year (only one cut/harvest per year), the co-operator will be paid half the rate eligible for that year (**\$150/acre for first year and \$125/acre for subsequent years**). If the co-operator chooses to only mow or cut and ted the crop without removing the cut plant material from the field, no reduction in cost share will be made.

Applications to DF&WT Grassland Set-aside program should only be made for acreage within the Municipalities of Delta or Richmond, BC. Entry into the program is dependant on funding. Applications are date stamped upon arrival at the DF&WT office and are treated on a first come, first served basis.



For more information on grassland set-asides or participation in the program, please contact DF&WT.

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Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, charitable society whose mission is to promote the preservation of farmland and associated wildlife habitat on the Fraser River delta through sustainable farming and land stewardship.

The DF&WT Grassland Set-aside Program is currently funded by: VYR Wildlife Stewardship Fund, Partners in Stewardship Fund, Delta Agricultural Society, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, Habitat Stewardship Fund and the many supporters of DF&WT.