



Soil Quality Enhancement Activity – SQL06 – Conversion of cropped land to grass-based agriculture for biomass or forage production and wildlife habitat

State Criteria

Implementation of this enhancement **requires** cropland converted to perennial grassland which is mechanically harvested; it is not grazed.

Cropland conversion to Grass-based Agriculture

- Establish high biomass producing, wildlife-friendly, perennial grassland species (e.g., switchgrass, big bluestem, indiangrass, eastern gamagrass, etc.) on cropland according to the NRCS [Pasture and Hay Planting \(512\)](#) conservation practice standard; use no-till planting methods to minimize soil disturbance when applicable
- Use seeding mixtures of at least three perennial grasses and/or perennial forbs
- Use plant density observations from multiple areas in the field(s) to confirm successful establishment two years from the planting date; compare the actual to the recommended plant density for the seeding mix and region (e.g., at least 10 plants of the seeded mixture per square yard)

Use one of the following techniques (A or B) to protect wildlife during harvesting activities.

- A. Defer harvest.** The producer *will apply and maintain at least two of the following* management actions to improve or protect grassland functions for the state identified targeted wildlife species.

The wildlife management objectives for most grazing management plans using this enhancement will include one or more of the following groups of targeted wildlife species:

- Grassland-dependent Songbirds – including species that prefer tall, dense structure such as Henslow’s sparrow, chestnut-collared longspur, common yellowthroat, dickcissel, and bobolink.
- Upland Game Birds – including species that need undisturbed nesting habitat such as Northern bobwhite quail, greater prairie chicken, plains sharp-tailed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, and wild turkey.
- Waterfowl and Water Birds (for grasslands in proximity to wetlands and other water features) – including species such as mallard, blue-winged teal, Northern pintail, etc.

- 1) Do not harvest plant biomass on at least 1/3 of the acres each year; idled acres will not be disturbed during the primary nesting or fawning seasons based on state established dates for the targeted species; idle strips or blocks must be at least 30 feet wide
- 2) Harvest is allowed on all acres each year; however, for at least 1/3 of the acreage, harvest must be either before and/or after, not during, the primary nesting or fawning seasons based on state established dates for the targeted species
- 3) Allow time in the growing season for an increase in plant height after the last harvest to state specified minimum heights for wildlife on all harvested acres; or when harvest is conducted at the end of the summer growing season, harvest at the greater of the recommended height for the plant species or the state specified height for wildlife

- B. Flush wildlife.** For all harvest activities that will be conducted during the nesting/fawning season the producer will implement *at least two of the following* to protect wildlife during the harvesting operation:
- 1) Attach a flush bar on biomass/forage harvesting equipment
 - 2) Harvest only during daylight hours
 - 3) Begin all harvesting activities at one end of the field and work back and forth across the field, or begin harvest in the center of the field and work outward; avoid trapping wildlife



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in cover that remains in the center of a field when the harvest pattern starts at the outside and works inward

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Complete the Table below:

To be completed by NRCS and Producer during planning			To be completed by Producer during certification
1	2	3	4
Tract	Field	Acres Planned	Acres Applied
<i>Ex. T1001</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>

Ex. = example. NRCS completes column 1, 2 & 3 (Tract, Field and Acres Planned, etc). Operator completes remaining columns.

I certify that the following information meets specifications and have been provided to NRCS:

1. Map showing the location of the field(s) that was/were converted from cropland to grassland including a list of the species that were included in the planting mix for each field.
2. Record of plant density by species (seeded and volunteer; number of plants/sq yd for each species present) for multiple areas in the field(s) prior to harvest each year.
3. Provide a photo showing:
 - Option A – stubble height of plants after harvest for each harvest period
 - Option B – flush bar attachment on the tractor used for harvesting

I understand that it is my responsibility to obtain all necessary permits and to comply with all laws, regulations and ordinances pertaining to the application of these activities.

Certified by: _____ **Date:** _____