

# Description of LESA Criteria for Grasslands Reserve Program Connecticut (2012)

Criteria based on Farm Bill language, Interim Final Rule, and Connecticut-specific information.

1. Farm Bill language does not designate an acreage minimum. In Connecticut, areas of 20 acres or greater have significant value for grassland birds. Smaller clusters and fields in the vicinity of clusters are also of value to raptors. Ideally, parcels are contiguous grassland. In Connecticut, due to our small field size, incidental areas of hedgerows, riparian corridors, narrow forest areas, and corner woodlots often make up a definable area for the rental agreement or easement. Farm infrastructure for grassland agriculture can be included.
2. No more than 10% of the areas can be incidental lands in a rental agreement or easement.
3. Prime, important, and locally important farmland soils indicate the productivity of the grassland agriculture. Parcels with a higher percentage are a higher priority to protect. These areas are also the easiest to develop into cropland or non-agricultural uses.
4. The focus of the GRP Program is to maintain grasslands-based agriculture and, where viable and important, protect and restore habitat for grassland-based plant and animal species. Parcels managed for both receive a higher score. The Farm Bill places an additional emphasis on pastureland.
5. Parcels currently in well-managed grasslands received the highest score. Restoration needs might include removal of invasive species, or conversion of cropland or shrub land back to grasslands. Clearing woodland is not considered restoration. GRP funds will not be available for restoration.
6. Active farmland/grasslands surrounded by similar land uses is the most viable for agriculture and grassland habitat.
7. Compatible adjacent land uses are important to keeping agriculture viable and free of vandalism, complaints, and lawsuits. Residential development is also not compatible for habitat due to invasive species and predation from house pets.
8. The level of commitment of the applicant to long-term agriculture is indicated by the length of rental agreement/. For easements, leveraging by the entity or landowner receives a higher priority.
9. Indicates areas in Connecticut with the greatest threat and/or highest priority for habitat.
10. Keeping agricultural lands with multiple non-market values is a high priority. All concerns that apply are totaled. Municipal support is critical to the viability of agriculture. Support may include the following: establishment of an Agriculture Commission; establishment of a Preservation Committee; establishment of a funding mechanism; farm friendly Planning and Zoning regulations, and agriculture recognized in the Plan of Conservation and Development.