



# vermont environmental stewardship PROGRAM

Working Lands for a Better Vermont



## VESP Pilot Program Update 2020

The goal of the Vermont Environmental Stewardship Program (VESP) is to accelerate water quality improvements through additional voluntary implementation efforts and provide social recognition to farmers who strive for environmental excellence. Participants must be actively farming in Vermont and meet existing environmental regulations (e.g. Required Agricultural Practices). The environmental stewardship assessment focuses on nutrient management, sediment and erosion control, soil health, air quality, carbon sequestration, and pasture health. Farms that meet all the minimum environmental stewardship thresholds will be VESP Certified through third party verification for a 5-year period. Farms that need to improve management will be eligible for conservation planning services through existing VAAF, NRCS and partner programs.

VESP is currently in a pilot phase to develop the full program. Eight farms from a diversity of farm types, sizes and locations are being assessed. The goal of the pilot program is to vet the USDA-NRCS Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool (RSET) to ensure this national tool accurately assesses Vermont's unique landscape and agronomic managements and that the thresholds meet the goals of VESP.

### Eligibility Requirements

*(voluntary program)*

- Actively farming in Vermont
- Fields managed (owned and leased) by the farm
- Meet existing state & federal environmental regulations, including VT's Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs):
  - Farm Inspection
  - Manure & Soil Tests
  - Nutrient Management

### 8 FARMS ENROLLED

6 Dairy, 1 Beef, 1 Diversified

1 LFO, 1 MFO, 3 CSFO, 3 SFO

Across 5 Counties

Providing Recognition and Support to Farmers Who Strive for Environmental Excellence

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8 FARMS

1,511 ACRES

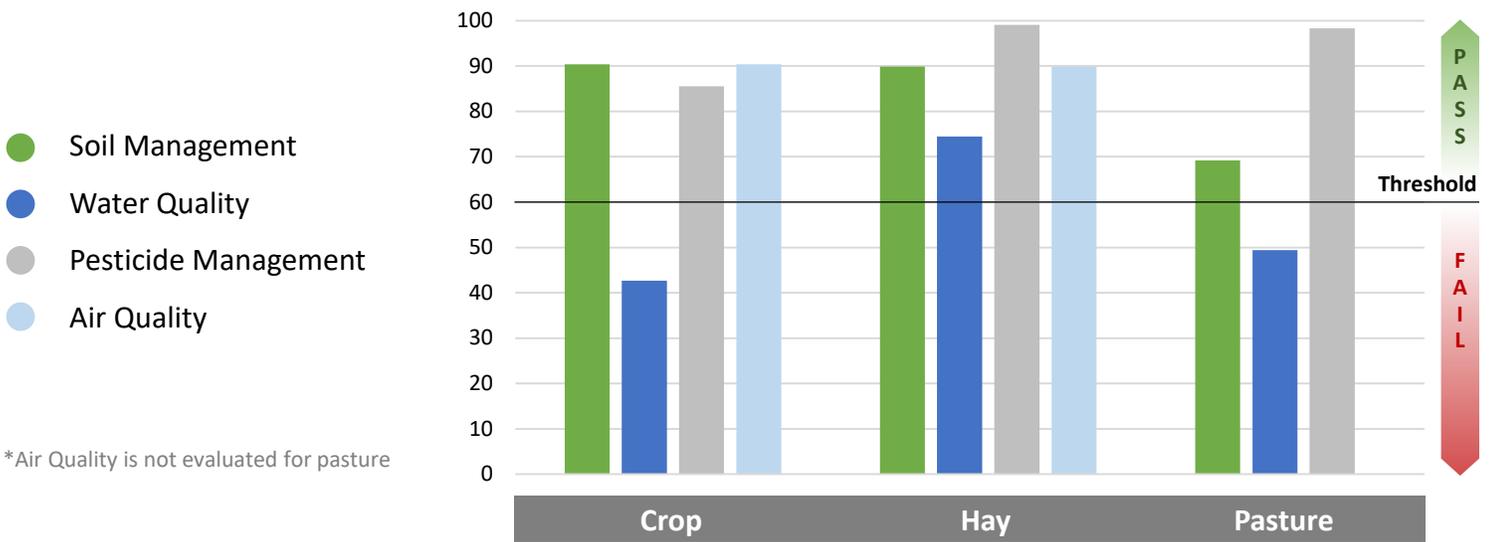
148 FIELDS

EVALUATED IN RSET

The VESP pilot program uses the USDA-NRCS Resource Stewardship Evaluation Tool (RSET) to evaluate environmental stewardship on farms. RSET combines measurement and modelling to evaluate stewardship across four natural resource concerns: soil management, water quality, pesticide management and air quality. Stewardship is compared to science-based thresholds set nationally by NRCS at levels that balance agricultural production and environmental quality. Each field evaluated must meet the stewardship threshold across all four resource categories in order to be certified for VESP.

## Stewardship

### Average RSET Scores

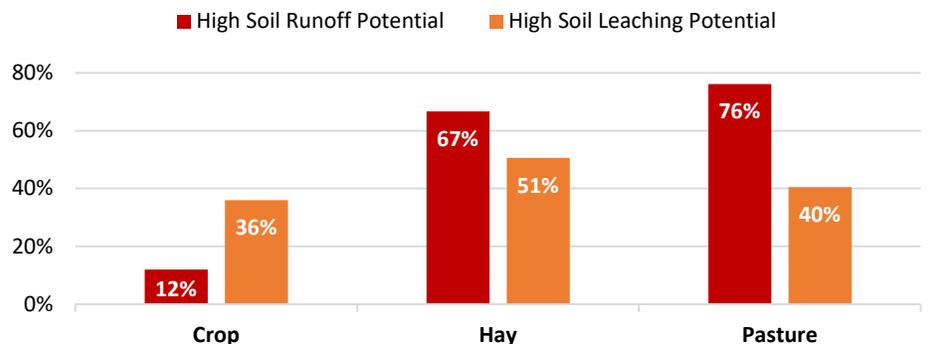


	Crop (annual or rotated crops)	Hay (permanent hay)	Pasture
Acres Evaluated	454	761	297
Number of Fields Evaluated	18	76	42
Number of Fields that Meet All Thresholds	5	74	24
Percent of Fields that Meet All Thresholds	28%	97%	57%
Average Cornell Soil Health Score	67 (High)	75 (High)	76 (High)

## Site Risk

### Frequency of High Runoff & Leaching Potentials

RSET determines the site risk for each field based on soils, slope and climate data. The Vermont landscape has high risk of soil runoff and leaching based on the pilot study results (right). The above environmental stewardship is achieved despite these challenges.



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