

2019 FAP Program Grantee Spotlight:

Elysian Fields



Photo above: Joe Hescoock walks across a cover cropped field on his farm, Elysian Fields, during the verification of his field practices by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (AAFM). On field checks, which occur prior to payment, staff from AAFM meet with the farm to discuss their conservation practices, review farm records, and walk the fields to look for evidence of practice installation.

By the Numbers

~110 acres in crop rotation
 ... of which
 ~103 acres used nurse crop
 \$4,877 awarded
 ~1120 lbs P reduced from
 conservation practice

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 keep doing a good job”

– Joseph Hescoock, co-owner of
 Elysian Fields

Recipient

Elysian Fields is an organic, diversified family farm in Shoreham VT, owned and operated by Joseph and Kathleen Hescoock. The Hescocks primarily milk dairy cows but also raise cattle and hogs for beef and pork. All their animals are rotationally grazed.

Grant Award

\$4,877 for conservation crop rotation on ~110 acres with a nurse crop on ~103 of those acres

Funding Source

Farm Agronomic Practice (FAP) program

Grant details

Joe and Kathleen Hescoock applied to the FAP program in FY 2019 to receive practice payment for cover cropping and conservation crop rotation with a nurse crop. That year was the Hescocks’ first year applying to FAP, although they have implemented crop rotations and nurse crops every year since starting their farm in 1991. They intend to apply again in FY 2020 and to add their acres of rotational grazing to their application.

Impact

For Joe Hescock, the importance of his FAP grant payment is less about the money, and more about the public recognition of his environmental stewardship. Joe sees the drive to improve water quality in the state of Vermont as “a team effort,” and noted that the FAP payment “makes it feel like we’re part of the team.”

Not only does the FAP program make farmers feel that their land stewardship is appreciated, Joe explained, it incentivizes them to implement or to continue implementing beneficial conservation practices on their farms. “It’s great to be paid because you are doing a good job – I appreciate that,” he shared. “It [also] incentivizes you to keep doing a good job.”

Joe thinks that this form of payment for stewardship practices is especially important in consideration of the regulatory burden that farmers are under. “We get a lot of regulations from the state,” Joe commented, “so it’s nice to see them giving a bit of money back” to support practices that go above and beyond those regulations.

Joe Hescock acknowledged that the financial value of the FAP payment is “a drop in the bucket” in the economic health of Elysian Fields. However, he found the grant payment, small as it was, helped last year when the farm went to implement conservation practices. “It was a tight year and it was hard to come up with the money for the cover crop seed,” Joe shared. Thankfully, the FAP payment “almost paid for the seed, which was great.”

In future years, Joe intends to apply to the FAP program again for cover cropping and implementing conservation crop rotation with nurse crop, as well as for the rotational grazing practice payment, which was new to the program in 2019. To be eligible for as many acres as possible in that program, however, he plans to make some changes. “Our cows have a little access to water right now, so we’re thinking we’re going to fence them out” to make those fields eligible for FAP payments, Joe shared.

“We get a lot of regulations from the state, so it’s nice to see them giving a bit of money back... I feel more like we’re part of the team to improve water quality.”

– Joe Hescock, co-owner of Elysian Fields



Joe Hescock grows a nurse crop of pea plants, oats and barley as part of his conservation crop rotation. Annual nurse crops aid in the establishment of perennial forages because they reduce weed growth and shelter the perennial seedlings from the elements. Part of the legume family of plants, peas fix nitrogen in their roots and thereby reduce the need for fertilizer additions.