



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont

An organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working to promote an economically viable and ecologically sound Vermont food system

Need Organic Hay?

By Cheryl Bruce - VOF Certification Staff

If you need hay and forages to supplement the harvests from your farm, the VOF office has an 'Organic Hay and Forage Directory' that lists by county all the producers certified to sell organic forages which may assist you with your search. All purchased hay that is fed to transitional or organic animals must be **certified** organic. However, a commonly asked question is 'Can I use hay from my neighbor's field?'

If the neighbor's land has not received any prohibited materials in the last three years, the answer is yes, as long as the proper paperwork is in place before the hay is harvested. If you find yourself looking for hay in March, this is probably not the case, since by now that hay was harvested many months ago. As a rule, VOF is unable to certify crops retroactively. However, you can start planning ahead for the coming year to ensure you have an adequate supply of hay next winter.

So how can you use your neighbor's hay? One way is to add the neighbor's fields to your existing certification. We encourage producers to do this in the spring, before the first cut is taken. For each field you want to add, you would complete a three-year history form and have the landowner sign an affidavit to verify this management. If you call the VOF office, we will send you the necessary forms. Once the completed paperwork has been received by VOF, it will be added to your file and those fields will be considered part of your certification.

For those farmers who are in the middle of their one year dairy transition who are not yet certified, you do not have to submit this paperwork ahead of time, just be sure to include these fields in your initial farm production plan (application) for certification.

Please note that by adding another producer's fields to your certification, you are taking responsibility for the organic management of those fields. When you submit your farm production plan, you will need to provide production records for those fields or have them available at the time of the annual inspection. For each field, either you or your neighbor should keep detailed records of all inputs applied, with dates and amounts, as well as a record of harvest yields.

We often hear from producers who say 'This field hasn't had anything applied in 10 years.' While this field would be considered certifiable, it is VOF policy that once a field is certified, the producer must manage the soil fertility. Examples could include applications of animal manure, lime or other mineral inputs, and soil testing. An added benefit of fertility management will be a higher quality feed for your animals.



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Make sure your neighbor understands that they cannot sell organic hay outright, as they are not certified to do so. If your neighbor is interested in selling hay to multiple parties, encourage them to become certified. Have them call the VOF office and we can talk to them about the process of certification and send the application materials to them. Again, it is preferable to start the process early in the season, so that the land can be certified before they take their first cut. It seems that there is so much hay land out there that qualifies for certification. By reaching out to neighboring farmers in your area, we may be able to certify enough land to meet the organic forage needs of all the organic livestock in Vermont.