

June 7, 2021

NRI – GL Hayland Data Collection Questions

Field data collection on land that appears to be hayland should occur unless the data collector has knowledge that the field truly meets the NRI-GL definition of hayland in that it is cropland that is currently managed for hay. Since landowner interviews are not conducted and other NRCS resources are not reviewed (conservation plans, FSA farm records, etc) it may not be possible to know the rotation and therefore what appears to be hayland could instead be grassland that was cut for hay on occasion. Therefore, follow the guidance “when in doubt, collect the data”.

What definition of hayland should we use for NRI-GL data collection and why?

Although other landuse definitions may exist or have consideration in other areas of NRCS work (programs, planning, etc), the NRI definitions must be used for all NRI data collection. For examples of hayland definition changes consider that Hay was a land use designation as recently as the January 2013 release of Amendment 5 of the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) when it was one of 15 designated landuses for planning purposes. However, in November 2014 NRCS released Amendment 6 of the NPPH and hay was not one of the 10 listed landuse designations. This illustrates how hayland can change in other areas of NRCS policy. Because the NRI-GL data collection study is a long-term study and data collection effort, definitions must remain static and changes must be carefully planned and orchestrated. For NRI-GL purposes, the definition of hayland is the one found in the Handbook of Instructions in Appendix D which must also take into account the definition of cropland. When the two definitions are considered together, hayland can be summarized as noncultivated cropland that is permanently managed for hay production or cultivated cropland that contains hay as part of the rotation. Therefore, it may be impossible to determine if the land use is hayland in the field so data collection should occur.

When should we collect data on hayland?

To answer this you must first determine if this is truly hayland. For NRI-GL purposes, hayland is cropland so it is not eligible for NRI-GL data collection. However, your decision should be based on whether the field truly meets the NRI-GL hayland definition (is it cropland that is in hay) or whether it is grassland or pastureland that is hayed. In other words, how it is primarily managed? Grassland that is occasionally cut for hay may not meet the hayland definition and therefore is eligible for collection. It may be hard to determine if the field meets the hayland definition or not since we do not perform landowner interviews or use other NRCS resources such as conservation plans and FSA records, so when in doubt, collect the data. Do not use the presence/absence of fences as the deciding factor since it is possible that a field could be grazed using temporary fencing or that occasional haying may occur. Likewise, the presence of bales of hay may not accurately reflect whether the field is hayland or if it is a pasture that was cut for hay once every 10 years. Data collected is added to the dataset and helps the agency in one of the many ways that this data is utilized. Lost opportunities to collect are lost data. When in doubt, collect the data.

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What should we do if we arrive at a field that has just been mowed for hay and the hay has not been harvested? NOTE: This question could also pertain to a pasture or other area that is eligible for collection and was very recently mowed with clippings laying everywhere.

In these cases, the data collector would leave the mowed forage in place, treat the clippings as litter, and collect the data.

What do we do with land that we are not sure is mowed for hay or grazed since there are no fences?

Collect the data. It is important to remember that grazing is not a requirement for a segment/point to be eligible for sampling and fences alone do not determine the landuse since a field without a fence could be grazed with temporary fencing or, in some states, the field could be in an area considered "open range" whereby no fences are needed. The possibilities are too numerous to account for so data collection is encouraged when there are doubts.

This guidance conflicts with what I/we have done in the past. What should we do?

Collect based upon current guidance/interpretations. The subject matter experts are aware that guidance has been sporadic or inconsistent. We cannot go back and undo that but we can work towards consistency in the future. That begins with ensuring that we have clear guidance in the present.