

# Plant Solutions

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The NRCS Plant Materials Program eNewsletter for the conservation community

## Landowners Create Wildlife Habitat with Conservation Plants

Tom Helm recently created 350 acres of grassland bird habitat on his property as part of the Farm Bill's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

The Toston, Montana, seed grower knew the project's success depended on the type of grass he planted. He chose 'Trailhead' basin wildrye,



Montana grower Tom Helm

selected and released by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Plant Materials Program.

"'Trailhead' is a wonderful, underutilized grass that provides good habitat for pheasants and Hungarian partridges," Helm says.

Over the last three years alone, farmers and ranchers planted over 3.2 million acres of Plant Materials releases as part of Farm Bill cost-sharing. These numbers are expected to rise in coming years.

"The 2002 Farm Bill represents the largest investment in conservation on America's working lands in history," says NRCS Chief Bruce Knight. "The use of conservation plants will be critical to accomplishing the bill's important mission."

Greg Gould, landowner in Cascade County, Montana, used three conservation plants for his 338-acre WHIP habitat—"Trailhead" along with



Landowner Greg Gould

'Garrison' creeping foxtail and 'Lutana' cicer milkvetch.

"Assistance from the Plant Materials Program regarding varieties of grasses and legumes to fit into upland and sub-irrigated or flooded sites was very beneficial," he says.

The following plants are examples of Plant Materials species used in Farm Bill programs—such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)—to provide wildlife food, cover and nesting habitat.



**'Aztec' Maximilian sunflower**  
Native perennial for the central and southern Great Plains. Good food source for wildlife and livestock.



**'Rimrock' Indian ricegrass**  
Native perennial for use in the Northern Great Plains. Excellent for wildlife food and cover and as a forage for livestock.



**'Shelter' switchgrass**  
Native perennial for use in the eastern U.S. to the Great Plains. 'Shelter' stands up to winter snowloads, providing excellent spring nesting habitat for game birds.



## Creature Feature

### *Ring-necked Pheasant*

Ring-necked pheasants are found in almost every state and use cropland and areas of densely growing grasses and shrubs for food, cover and nesting habitat. They eat mostly waste grains, seeds, plants and berries, and depend on grassy cover often found in CRP, fencerows, roadsides, ditch banks, shelterbelts, wetland edges and lightly grazed pastures for nesting.

Pheasant habitat can be established through a mix of native grasses such as switchgrass, big bluestem and indiangrass. These tall grasses have rigid stems that tend to stand up in snow and native grasses require less long-term maintenance.



## Ask the Expert

*Terry Conway, Plant Materials Specialist, Salina, Kansas*

### **How can landowners enhance existing CRP stands for improved wildlife benefits?**

NRCS offers producers an opportunity to improve their chances for re-enrollment into CRP if they enhance existing stands with additional plant species for diversity and subsequently better wildlife habitat. The NRCS Plant Materials Center in Manhattan, Kansas, examined the effect of several seedbed preparation techniques and seeding methods on the establishment of wildflower and legume species planted directly into CRP stands. Results show the most successful method involves shallow disking or burning early in the spring followed by drilling of the seed mixture.

**For more info:** <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/kspmstn240300.pdf>

**Contact:** Terry Conway, [terry.conway@ks.usda.gov](mailto:terry.conway@ks.usda.gov).



## Did You Know?

Did you know that Russian olive is now listed on the invasive species list in Colorado and New Mexico? While it is still a popular shrub for windbreaks and shelterbelts in semi-arid and saline environments, it also is very invasive in wet-saline and riparian areas, and has the ability to displace native species.

**For more info:** <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/wapmctn470302.pdf>.

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## Quotable Quotes

“The only source of knowledge is experience.” —Albert Einstein

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