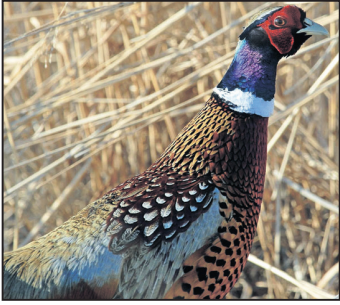


# Program Pays Farmers to Spare Field Edges for Wildlife



**Pa. Game Commission**  
A ring-necked pheasant.

**TOM VENESKY**

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Pheasants Forever hopes to make field edges more profitable for farmers and more beneficial for wildlife.

The organization recently launched the Field Border Incentive Program, which pays farmers to set aside the borders of crop fields to give a boost to wildlife and the Chesapeake Bay.

The program pays farmers to plant perennial grass and wildflower cover along the edges of crop field edges.

These areas are usually low-yielding because of shading and competition from trees, but paying farmers to turn edges into wildlife habitat could help farmers financially.

“We’re very excited about this program and think it is a win-win for farmers, birds and the bay,” said

Julia Smith, the Pennsylvania state coordinator for Pheasants Forever. “We rolled out the program in August, and there has already been interest.”

The program is funded by a \$500,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Farms are eligible for the program in the watersheds for these creeks in eastern Pennsylvania — Catawissa, Fishing, Little Swatara,

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## Program

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Mahanoy, Mahantango, Roaring, Shamokin, Swatara and Wiconis-

co. The watersheds are in Berks, Columbia, Dauphin, Lebanon, Montour, Northumberland and Schuylkill counties.

The field borders can range in width from 50 to 150 feet, depending on the shape of the field, and farmers enroll for a 10-year commitment. The payments are made in one lump sum and range from \$1,200 per acre for a border 50 to 89 feet wide, to \$2,000 per acre for a border 120 to 150 feet wide.

Biologist Andrea Hanson said the incentives can be paired with other programs, such as USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, which can partially offset the cost of implementation and increase the financial benefit. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program can help cover seed and planting costs.

If a farmer wants to cut hay in the field border area, Smith said that wouldn't be possible if it was paired with CREP, but it can be done with the border program.

"They can hay it if it's just in the field border program as long as they avoid the nesting season, April to July," she said. "Once the field border is established, mowing for hay or to control weeds, or even grazing, is limited to outside the nesting season."



Pheasants Forever

A new program from Pheasants Forever pays farmers to let the edges of their fields grow into wildlife habitat.



Pheasants Forever is offering farmers a financial incentive to plant their field edges in perennial grass for wildlife habitat and to reduce nutrient and sediment runoff.

Aside from creating pheasant habitat, Hanson said field borders are also attractive to ground-nesting birds, rabbits, turkeys and a host of other wildlife species.

"They are very practical, and they provide great places to hunt," she said.

Smith said there is no limit on the amount of land an individual can enroll, as long as funds are available and the fields meet the criteria. If funding continues to be made available, she added, the program could be expanded to other areas in the future.

"We went big with the incentives with the hope that once people try field borders, they'll see it makes sense," Smith said.

"These are areas where trees and limbs fall and crops compete with trees for moisture and sunlight — cropland areas that aren't profitable.

"If you take these areas out and put them in perennial grass for wildlife and the bay, everyone benefits."

Enrollment is open and the field borders have to be installed by June 30, 2025.

For more information or to enroll, contact:

- Lebanon and Dauphin counties: Elli Liput, 717-403-6536, [eliput@pheasantsforever.org](mailto:eliput@pheasantsforever.org)
- Schuylkill and Berks counties: Jenna Emore, 717-673-4649, [jemore@pheasantsforever.org](mailto:jemore@pheasantsforever.org)
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