

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a field of tall green grass, likely wheat or barley, blowing vigorously in the wind. The grass is a vibrant green color, and the motion blur gives a sense of dynamic energy. The background is a soft, out-of-focus continuation of the grass field.

Prime Agricultural Land

Soil map units are Prime Farmland if they have the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed fiber, forage, and oilseed crops and are also available for these uses. The present land use may be cropland, pasture, forestland, or other land uses, but not urban built-up land or water. Location, tract size, and accessibility to markets and support industries are not considered when making a Prime Farmland determination. The national definition of Prime Farmland was modified to include information that applies to soils in Vermont, in particular, a reference to moderately deep depth to bedrock.

Classification and Identification

Identification and Classification

NRCS Surveys: The [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) identifies these lands, often, using, county, soil, surveys, and, digital, mapping, etc.

Categories: Prime farmland is part of a broader classification system that includes "Unique Farmland" and "Farmland of Statewide and Local Importance".

Farmland Classification Systems for Vermont Soils

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**United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service**





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Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Prime Agricultural Land

Key Characteristics and Criteria

- **Soil Quality:** High-quality, sustainable, and productive soil.
- **Physical Properties:** Good water and air permeability, low erodibility, and typically, little to no rock fragments in the upper soil layers.
- **Topography and Moisture:** Generally, level to gently sloping, with, or, protected from flooding, ensuring, proper water management.
- **Climate:** A favorable growing, season.



Specific Identification Characteristics

- Soil moisture is adequate to sustain commonly grown cultivated crops throughout the growing season in 7 or more years out of 10. Soil temperature and growing season are favorable.
- The soils are neither too acid nor too alkaline, or the soils respond readily to additions of lime
- The soils have no water table, or the water table can be maintained at a sufficient depth during the growing season to allow for the growth of commonly grown cultivated crops.
- The soils are not frequently flooded (less often than once in 2 years) during the growing season.
- Slope is favorable (generally less than 8 percent) and the soils are not subject to serious erosion.
- Water moves readily through the soil and root-restricting layers are absent within 20 inches of the surface.
- Less than 10 percent of the surface layer consists of rock fragments coarser than 3 inches in diameter.
- The soils are typically deep (greater than 40 inches to bedrock), but include moderately deep soils (20 to 40 inches) with adequate available water capacity.

Unique Farmland

Land other than Prime Farmland that is used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops.

It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high quality and/or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.

It is used for specific high-value food or fiber crops.

There is currently no Unique Farmland identified in Vermont.

Additional Farmland of Statewide Importance

The dominant soils in these soil map units have limitations resulting from one or more of the following conditions:

- Excessive slope and erosion hazard,
- Excessive wetness or slow permeability
- A flooding hazard,
- Shallow depth (less than 20 inches) to bedrock or to other layers that limit the rooting zone and available water capacity,
- Moderately low to very low available water capacity.

Additional Farmland of Local Importance

These lands can be identified as Additional Farmland of Local Importance by the appropriate local agencies.

Addison County

Adams loamy sand, 8 to 15 percent slopes

Colton gravelly sandy loam, 5 to 12 percent slopes

Raynham silt loam, 6 to 12 percent slopes

Franklin County

Missisquoi loamy sand, 8 to 15 percent slopes

Rutland County

Adams loamy sand, 8 to 15 percent slopes

Hinckley gravelly loamy fine sand, 8 to 15 percent slopes

Windsor loamy sand, 8 to 15 percent slopes