

How to Get Site-Specific Information on Primary Agricultural Soils from the NRCS Web Soil Survey website September 2006

- Log on to Web Soil Survey: <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>
- Click the **Start WSS** button to open Web Soil Survey

Tab 1. Area of Interest (AOI)

- **Navigate by County** – choose Vermont as State and your county of interest in the drop-down menu. All Vermont counties except Caledonia and Essex are accessible through WSS. For those two counties, please contact the St. Johnsbury NRCS office @ 802-748-2641 for assistance.
- Click **View** to get the county shown on the Area of Interest Interactive Map on right side of screen. A basic map of the county will appear, with major roads and water bodies shown.
- Use the **Zoom In** button to draw a box around the general part of the county you are interested in. You can repeat this step several times to get to the point where the property you are interested in appears in the map window. An airphoto background will appear with the map. Note: You can also try the **Navigate by Address** option.
- You may find the roads are not well placed on the imagery. This data comes from a source outside of NRCS and sometimes they do not fit on the imagery very well. Interstates are particularly poorly placed on the imagery, sometimes being off by miles! You can “turn off” road imagery and other Layers by clicking on the **Layers** tab at the side of the map. It will pop out. Scroll down to Transportation. Un-checking Roads will turn off that imagery. You can do the same for Water and Hydrography if desired, or any other Layer that’s checked. To close the Layers menu, click on the **X** button.
- To delineate your Area of Interest, click on one of the two **AOI** buttons on the map toolbar. The **AOI** button showing a box will delineate a rectangular area. The **AOI** button showing a multi-sided polygon will delineate an irregularly-shaped area – you must continue clicking at each corner and double-click at the point where you started to close the polygon.
- Once you have delineated your Area of Interest, the interactive map will zoom to show the area. On the left side of the screen, it will tell you the acreage of the area you have delineated.
- If you are not happy with the Area of Interest as shown, click the **Clear AOI** button and use the **AOI** buttons and draw tool to re-delineate it. Repeat as many times as needed. When you are satisfied with your Area of Interest, you’re ready to produce the Soil Map.

Tab 2. Soil Map

- Click on the **Soil Map** tab on top of the screen, in between the **Area of Interest** tab and the **Soil Data Explorer** tab. This will generate the soil map for the Area of Interest (from here on referred to as AOI) you have delineated. The screen will now show the Soil Map on the right and the Map Unit Legend Summary on the

left, with names of the soil map units and their acreage and percentage within the AOI.

Note: The information obtained in the step above should be provided as part of the summary soils matrix required in the Act 250 application under Criterion 9(B). To determine the Agricultural Value Group for each of the soils types, see *Farmland Classification Systems for Vermont Soils* on the NRB website (www.nrb.state.vt.us/lup/publications.htm).

- Again, you can turn off the Road layer or other supporting cartographic information by clicking on the **Layer** tab on the side of the map and un-checking the Layers you want to turn off.
- At this point, you can print out a copy of the soil map, save it to your computer, or continue on to the Soil Data Explorer section, which is where you'll generate the report and map for Primary Agricultural Soils for your AOI.
- To print a copy of the soil map or to save it to your computer, hit the **Create Printable Document** button. A small window will open – if you wish to give your map a custom name (like your name or your client's name), click the **Custom Subtitle** button and enter the name you wish. Then click the **View** button. This will generate a new view of the soil map as it will appear printed and display it on-screen. This image is an Adobe® pdf file. Using the toolbar, you can then print the map or save it to your computer. This map can also be emailed, but first has to be saved to your computer.
- This completes the Soil Map generation process. To generate a report on Primary Agricultural Soils for your AOI, continue to the next section.

Tab 3. Soil Data Explorer

- Click on the **Soil Data Explorer** tab on top of the screen to the right of the **Soil Map** tab.
- Under Soil Data Explorer, you'll see 5 new tabs. For most counties in Vermont, only the first 4 tabs contain data at this time. Feel free to browse them all.
- To generate a color-coded interpretative map and report of the Primary Agricultural Soils within your AOI, click on the second tab, **Suitabilities and Limitations for Use**.
- Under that tab, click on the **Land Classifications** button and then choose **Farmland Classification** from the drop-down menu.
- Under the Farmland Classification View Options: Map, Table, and Description of Rating should be checked.
- Generate the map by clicking the **View Ratings** button.
- The new color-coded Farmland Classification map will appear on the right side of the screen, with the accompanying table shown below it. To get a quick view of what the different colors mean, click on the **Legend** tab on the left side of the map. This will open up the Legend page. The table below the map will show the status of each soil map unit within your AOI. In the table, all soils listed as "Prime," "Statewide," or "Local Importance" qualify under the Act 250 definition of Primary Agricultural Soils ([10 V.S.A. § 6001\(15\)](http://www.nrb.state.vt.us/lup/publications.htm)). These soils will be highlighted in green or yellow; other soils will be highlighted in red. By then comparing this to

your proposed site plans you can **estimate** how many acres of Primary Agricultural Soils will be impacted, or you can return to Tab 1 above and draw another polygon or rectangle covering the specific impact area of your project to get a more accurate acreage for this area. In some cases it may be necessary to have this information confirmed by a surveyor or engineer.

Note: The information from the soils table and from your site plans should be used to complete the matrix under Criterion 9(B) regarding any impacts to primary agricultural soils.

- To print a copy of the Farmland Classification map, legend, and table, click on the **Create Printable Document** button and repeat the process described to print or save the Soil Map.
- You can also generate a Farmland Classification report without the color-coded interpretative map for your AOI by clicking on the **Soil Reports** tab at the top.
- Under the Soil Reports choice list on the left side of the screen, select **Land Classifications** and then choose the **Prime and other Important Farmlands** report.
- Click on the **View Soil Report** button to generate the report.
- This will generate a new screen and pdf file of the report, listing those soil map units in your AOI that meet the Act 250 definition of primary agricultural soils (soils with a rating of prime, statewide, or local importance).

Final note: Vermont-specific footnotes that apply to some Prime, Statewide and Locally Important Farmland soil map units do not appear in the reports currently available on this national website. Please contact the NRCS State Soil Scientist (steve.gourley@vt.usda.gov) or the NRCS Soil Resource Specialist (thomas.villars@vt.usda.gov) for more information.