



borrow the right equipment from a knowledgeable and experienced neighboring farmer. We quickly learned that no one within close proximity had ever grown legume hay before. No one had the right fertilizer spreader. No one had the right seeding equipment. But we did find the right mower. We were still successful in establishing this field—we made do with a spreader intended for granulated not powdery fertilizer; I hand seeded the field with a broadcast spreader; my husband fabricated a roller out of a water-filled wine barrel for me to drag behind our all-terrain type vehicle to compress the seed into the soil. And in early September, 94 bales of our own legume hay was cut, baled and stacked. Because we only got this one cutting and fairly late in the season, we don't have results from this part of the grant, but I'll continue the project next year, using weekly tests to see how quickly the nitrogen from the dry mulch hay is released. I have great hopes for good results—not only will I be suppressing weeds, but I'll be feeding the vegetables a slow-release nitrogen—and adding organic matter.

I consider the other part of the experiment a great success. In the future, I will always grow alfalfa or clover around my basil as I did this year. Over the course of 10 weeks, I cut the legume strips 3 times with a side-discharge lawnmower when they reached a height of about 8-10 inches, but I found the clippings were better applied by hand after they were bagged instead of blowing them into the basil row. Otherwise the basil leaves developed a blemish where the wet material hit. The weekly soil and basil leaf nitrogen tests showed an increase fairly soon after the wet legumes were applied—2-7 days. My own observation noted that I only had to apply fish emulsion once during the 10 weeks, something I would normally do 4-5 times over the season.

So why not try your hand at a SARE grant? Mine was only 6 pages long, and two of those were budget pages. The Northeast Region office of Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education is accepting applications from farmers in the Northeast for grants to support innovative, exploratory projects to enhance the sustainability of farms and farming. Deadline is Dec. 3. Applications and information are available at www.uvm.edu/~nesare/ or call 802-656-0471.