



Colorado Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Customer Focus

The 3R Ranch, owned by Reeves and Betsy Brown, is situated along the eastern slope of the Wet Mountains, southwest of Pueblo, Colorado. The 10,000 acre ranch sits in the middle of a large block of productive, working lands that embody Colorado's ranching heritage. Lying just east of the San Isabel National Forest, this area is a mosaic of ecosystems that provide important wildlife habitat and features breathtaking scenic beauty.

Mr. Brown says, "I believe preserving America's productive land is as high a priority as defending our country's freedoms against our enemies. Maintaining our unique quality of life in America is equally dependent upon both maintaining our ability to abundantly produce food and fiber wealth from our land base, and having the security to pursue our individual dreams and aspirations."

The Browns are part of the Wet Mountain Open Space Coalition that intends to protect a block of 20,000 acres through a combination of voluntary donations and "bargain sale" conservation easements. "Placing a permanent conservation easement on 3R Ranch was important to me in order to keep the ranch intact, and to have the tax advantages for passing the ranch to the next generation," says Mrs. Brown. The 1,080 acres of irrigated hayland, protected with matching funds from USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), is prime farmland and the "productive heart of the ranch."

Overview:

The USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) helps farmers and ranchers keep their productive land in agriculture. The program partners with States, Tribes, local governments and non-profit organizations to purchase conservation easements for the purpose of protecting topsoil by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land. NRCS provides up to 50% of the fair market value of the easement to the cooperating entity, which acquires, manages, and enforces the easement. Landowners participate voluntarily, and protected farms remain in private ownership.

Conservation plans are developed on all highly erodible cropland. Nationally, over \$101.3 million have been obligated to state and local entities since establishment of the program in 1996. The 2002 Farm Bill produced some changes in the program, including the addition of a provision providing for the protection of historical and archaeological resources on farm and ranchlands, and the inclusion of nongovernmental organizations as eligible entities. The Farm Bill also significantly increased the amount of financial assistance available under FRPP, authorizing nearly \$600 million through Fiscal Year 2007. Sixty-seven million dollars was allocated to states to purchase easements in FY 2003.

Accomplishments:

Cooperative entities' proposals are selected through a competitive process designed to protect parcels that will help accomplish FRPP and local land use goals. FRPP easements protect entire working farms, woodlands, wetlands, important natural areas, and historical and cultural resources. Through FY 2002, \$4,617,800 in FRPP funds have been awarded to cooperating entities in Colorado. These funds are protecting over 9,300 acres of agricultural lands on over 20 different properties around the state.

These include irrigated farmlands along the "Front Range," an orchard overlooking the Colorado River on the West Slope, and cattle ranches near Gunnison, Pueblo, and Steamboat Springs. In FY 2003, partners in Colorado requested \$6,926,997 in FRPP funds. This request represents 10.6 percent of the total amount of FRPP funds available nationwide in FY 2003. Colorado received \$2,715,000 to purchase easements in FY 2003.

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Outlook:

Colorado is among the fastest growing states in the nation, with approximately one million new residents tallied over the last decade and two million more expected by 2025. Telecommuters enjoy mountain living while working from home. Retirees find Colorado very appealing, especially the “West Slope.”

Extraordinary development pressure comes also from the demand for “second homes,” especially in mountain valleys near ski resorts. As a result, agricultural lands are being taken out of production, at a rate of about 130,000 acres per year. Most of Colorado’s agricultural lands are intimately connected with natural landscapes and ecosystems, and any loss of agricultural land can severely impact wildlife through fragmentation of habitat and disruption of migration corridors. Water supplies, water quality, and scenic resources may be affected, as well.

Smart Growth is a priority for Coloradans, and there is a large and growing demand for funding that will help acquire conservation easements to help manage growth and ensure the viability of agriculture for generations to come.

**Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program - Colorado Easements as of June 2003
Number, Acres, Easement Costs by County**

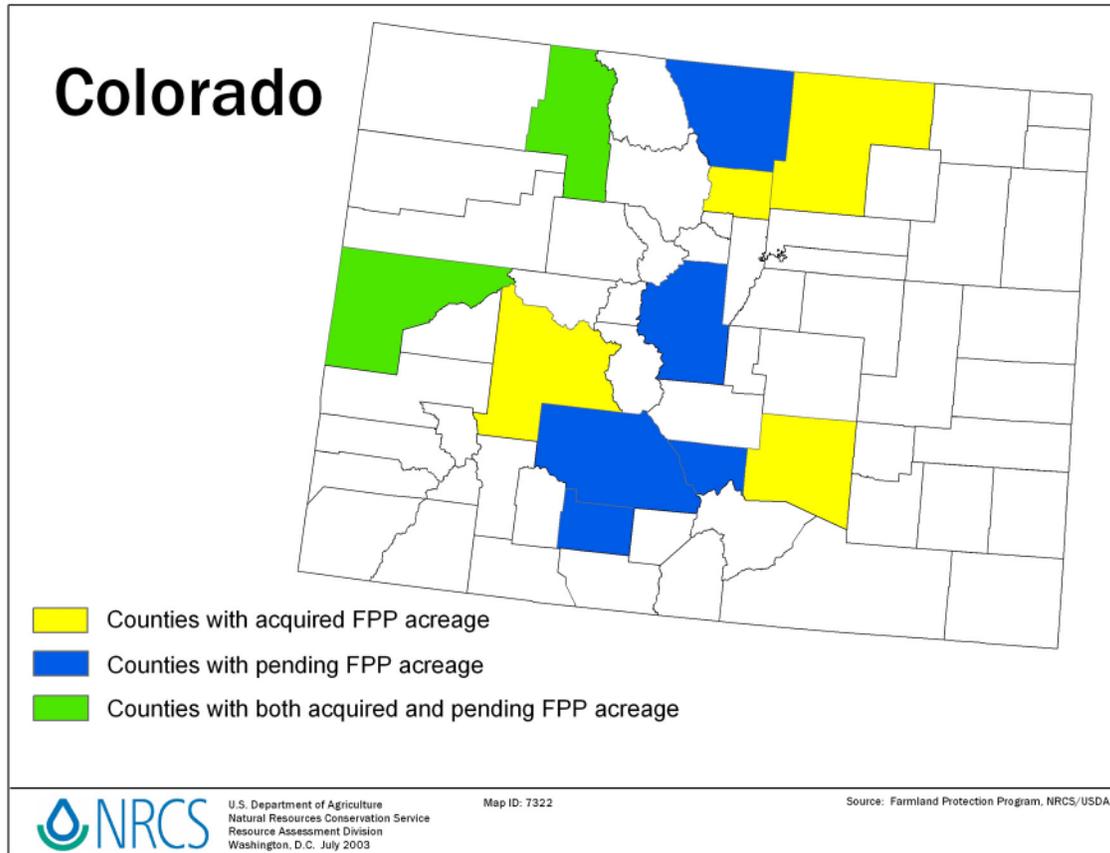
Colorado					
County	Acres	Easement Cost		Federal Payment	
		Total (\$)	Avg. (\$/acre)	\$	%
Routt	1,328	2,933,960	2,209	930,000	32%
Gunnison	2,764	2,544,871	921	1,070,000	42%
Mesa	33	268,500	8,136	134,250	50%
Pueblo	1,080	500,250	463	176,850	35%
Boulder	38	114,000	3,000	57,000	50%
Weld	192	1,110,129	5,782	510,974	46%
Total*	5,435	7,471,710	1,375	2,879,074	39%

*Totals do not include FY 2002 pending easements

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Counties with Acquired and Pending FRPP Easements



Trends in Population by County - Colorado 1990 to 2000 (Census Data)

