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News Release

Release No.: 000011.14

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NRCS ANNOUNCES SIGNUP FOR AGRICULTURE LAND, WETLAND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Applications for new Farm Bill program due by June 6

ATHENS, GA, (May 2, 2014)-- Acting State Conservationist Greg Kist, for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Georgia today announced a sign-up for Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) - applications are due by June 6. Funds for this program will be used for the purchase of conservation easements on eligible agricultural lands and wetlands in Georgia.

“This is an exciting new opportunity for even more people to get involved in conserving natural resources,” said Kist. “We encourage Indian tribes, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and private landowners to contact their local NRCS office to find out how to apply.”

The ACEP, created through the 2014 Farm Bill, is a program that has two components, known as Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE). The ACEP combines NRCS’ former Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Applications for the ACEP-ALE are accepted from eligible partners. These eligible entities may submit proposals to NRCS to acquire a conservation easement on eligible agricultural land. NRCS does not accept applications for ACEP-ALE directly from producers. Producers will need to work with an eligible entity to pursue funding for an ACEP-ALE conservation easement. Some examples of eligible entities include county Board of Commissioners, Land Trusts and Land Conservancies.

Approved ALE easements would prevent productive working lands from being converted to non-agricultural uses and maximize protection of land devoted to food production. Cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forestland are eligible.

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Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) applications are accepted directly from producers on eligible lands. Wetlands reserve easements would restore and enhance wetlands and improve habitat. Eligible lands include farmed or converted wetlands that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored.

Applications are currently being accepted for wetlands reserve easements and will be rated according to the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds, fish and other wildlife.

Applications must be submitted to Georgia NRCS by June 6 for both ACEP-ALE and ACEP-WRE. Applications are available your local USDA Service Center and at www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted. Agreements will be evaluated starting in late August.

Learn more about ACEP and other Farm Bill programs at <http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov>.

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