

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program



Herbert and Esther Kuhlman came up with a solution that breaks new ground in Oklahoma and protects their beloved pastures and alfalfa fields forever.



“Each farm is in its own situation,” said Kuhlman, who has lived on the farm since 1941. “I could see the development moving in on us, and we have to protect the greenbelt...this is one way of doing it.”



photos: NRCS Oklahoma

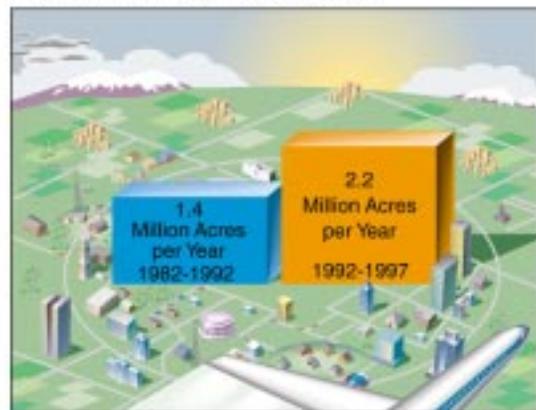
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is a voluntary program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service manages the program, and the goal of the program is to protect between 170,000 and 340,000 acres of farmland nationally. The program provides matching funds to state, Tribal, or local governments and nongovernmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements.

Agricultural Land Conversion

In the past, agricultural land conversion was thought of as happening only around major metropolitan areas, such as Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, and the Eastern corridor from Washington, D.C. to New York. However in Oklahoma, small and mid-sized cities such as Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Lawton and Ardmore, are experiencing rapid development and the consequent concerns associated with growing communities. The Oklahoma City, Enid and Lawton areas have some of the most productive soils in the state for wheat production. The

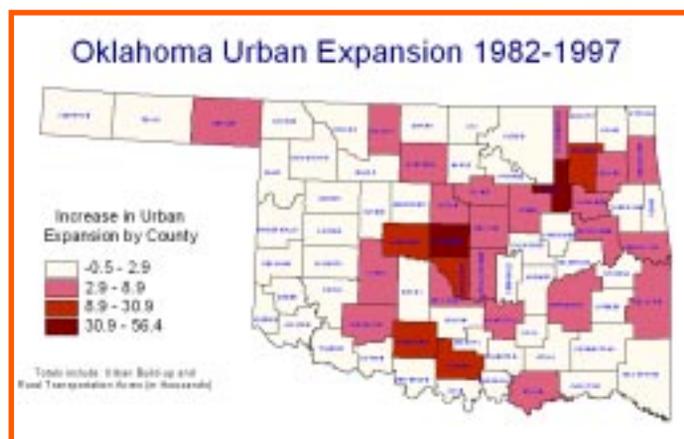
Land Converted to Development



Source: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service 1997 National Resources Inventory Revised December 2000

Ardmore area has a considerable amount of prime farmland used for wheat, grain sorghum, and peanut production. The Tulsa area has prime farmland that is agriculturally important for soybean and hay production.

Developed land in Oklahoma totaled only about four percent of the non-Federal land area in 1997; however from 1992-97, more land was developed (176,700 acres) than during 1982-92 (156,000 acres). The average annual rate of conversion was 15,600 acres per year from 1982-



92. The average annual rate of conversion was 35,340 acres per year from 1992-97. Growth and prosperity in non-agricultural sectors of the economy have been dominant forces in the expansion of developed areas. Although not considered a threat to food production nationally, urbanization and development leads to the fragmentation of agricultural land and the loss of prime farmland. From 1992-97, the national and Oklahoma rate of development more than doubled.

How It Works

USDA partners with state, Tribal, and local governments and nongovernmental organizations to acquire conservation easements from landowners. Participating landowners agree not to convert the land for nonagricultural uses, and to develop and implement a conservation plan based on the standards in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide. Landowners retain all rights to use the property for agriculture.

To participate, a landowner submits an application to an entity--a state, Tribal, or local government or a nongovernmental organization--that has an existing farmland protection program. Although a minimum of 30 years is required for conservation easements, priority is given to applications with perpetual easements.

Eligibility

To qualify for FRPP, the land offered must:

- Contain prime, unique, or other productive soil
- Be included in a pending offer from a state, Tribal, or local government or nongovernmental organization's farmland protection program
- Be privately owned
- Be covered by a conservation plan
- Be large enough to sustain agricultural production
- Be accessible to markets for what the land produces
- Be surrounded by parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production

If the land cannot be converted to nonagricultural

uses because of existing deed restrictions or other legal constraints, it is ineligible for FRPP.

Program Funding

Funding is through the Commodity Credit Corporation, which funds several USDA conservation programs. Since 1996, total funding for FRPP has been more than \$50 million.

Pioneer Family--Oklahoma's First Participants

On August 19, 2002, Herbert and Esther Kuhlman and their children became the first family in Oklahoma to convey a permanent deed of conservation easement on a working farm. The Kuhlman family farm is the home of one of Cleveland County's best-known pioneer families. The farm lies on the northern edge of Norman (the state's third largest city), directly in the path of sprawl advancing south from Oklahoma City. The Kuhlman's have always maintained sustainable farming practices, including crop rotation, natural windbreaks, and buffers along riparian areas of the Little River. The family has also taken steps to formalize their conservation practices by developing a 10-year soil conservation plan.

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) purchased the easement with funds from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and matching funds from the City of Norman. The TPL conveyed the easement to the Norman Area Land Conservancy (NALC), the state's first and only local land trust.

The Kuhlman's pioneering effort has paved the way for the successful implementation of the Norman Green-Belt Program. Responding to the alarming loss of working farms, ranches and open spaces in the Norman area, the citizens of Norman have developed a plan for a green-belt around their community. The green-belt will be comprised of parks, protected open space, and working farms and ranches. The city council created a Green-Belt Task Force to study the issue in detail and present city leaders with specific plans and areas to be protected. The plan was completed in the summer of 2002. The Kuhlman family farm is the cornerstone property in this land protection effort. The success and positive publicity surrounding the Kuhlman Farm easement have encouraged the City of Norman to take a measurable first step of appropriating \$100,000, each year for four years, for green-belt acquisition matching funds.

For More Information

For more information on this program or other USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or USDA Service Center, or check out the website: www.ok.usda.gov.