

The Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP) and the Inflation Reduction Act

Fact Sheet

The [Agricultural Conservation Easements Program \(ACEP\)](#) is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and aids landowners and eligible entities with conserving, restoring, and protecting wetlands, productive agricultural lands, and grasslands at risk to conversion to non-grassland uses. Healthy wetlands, farmlands and grasslands sequester carbon and provide many other natural resource benefits.

The [Inflation Reduction Act](#) included \$1.4 billion in additional funding for ACEP over five years and also revised ACEP authority in two ways:

- ♦ Provided Inflation Reduction Act funding for easements that will most reduce, capture, avoid or sequester greenhouse gas emissions
- ♦ Extended regular program funding through fiscal year 2031

Streamlining ACEP

NRCS is streamlining its conservation programs, including ACEP, to ensure that they are easier and more convenient to utilize, and to strengthen implementation of the [Inflation Reduction Act](#).

NRCS is streamlining ACEP appraisals, land surveys, and certifying eligible entities who help NRCS and producers enroll land into agricultural land easements.

Key program changes include:

- ♦ **Appraisals for Agricultural Land Easements (ALE):** The threshold for national review of ACEP-ALE appraisals is now \$3 million, raised from \$1 million. NRCS raised the threshold to align program requirements with increased land values, enabling the agency to better target staff resources and speed up implementation. Appraisals help ensure cost-effective and appropriate use of federal funds that are contributed to a conservation partner for their purchase of the ALE from the farmer or rancher.

- ♦ **Land Surveys for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE):** NRCS plans to encourage procurement of land surveys earlier in the acquisition timeline, such as when an application has been tentatively selected for an ACEP-WRE. These surveys establish land boundaries, which is needed to purchase and manage the easement. NRCS is also increasing its use of partnerships to assist with the land surveys and has simplified the review process for landowner-acquired land surveys. This will speed up the time it takes producers and landowners to enroll.

- ♦ **Certification of Entities for ACEP-ALE:** For ALE, NRCS works with eligible entities, such as American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations, to conserve prime farmland and at-risk grasslands. NRCS is working to expand the number of entities by launching a certification initiative to proactively notify potentially eligible entities that they qualify for administrative flexibilities. Certified entities have greater independence and less oversight in their acquisition of easements funded under ACEP-ALE. Information for entities on how to get certified is available on the [ALE webpage](#).



Inflation Reduction Act

In total, the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) provides \$19.5 billion over five years to support USDA's oversubscribed conservation programs like ACEP. Part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the Inflation Reduction Act, represents the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in American history.

How to Apply

NRCS accepts applications year-round for ACEP. However, to be considered for the current Inflation Reduction Act national funding cycle, eligible entities and landowners must apply by **November 13, 2023**.

Otherwise, applications must be submitted by your [state's ranking dates](#) to be ranked locally for funding consideration.

For more information, please contact NRCS at your local [USDA Service Center](#).





Expansion of Priority Areas

NRCS is also expanding the national priority areas eligible for Inflation Reduction Act funding for ACEP easements.

For ACEP-ALE, NRCS is prioritizing:

- ♦ Grasslands in areas of highest risk for conversion to non-grassland uses to prevent the release of soil carbon stores
- ♦ Agricultural lands under threat of conversion to non-agricultural uses
- ♦ Geographically specific priorities including rice cultivation on subsiding highly organic soils

For ACEP-WRE, NRCS is prioritizing:

- ♦ Land with organic soils and mineral soils high in organic carbon
- ♦ Eligible lands that will be restored to and managed as forests, for example bottomland hardwood forests
- ♦ Eligible lands in existing forest cover that will continue to be managed as forests.
- ♦ Several geographically specific priorities (i.e., cranberry bogs, wet meadows, and ephemeral wetlands in grassland ecosystems)

