

# Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)



## What is an easement?

A conservation easement is a voluntary land use agreement between a landowner and a public agency or a non-profit group working in the public interest.

You can use an easement to:

- Preserve the place you love for future generations.
- Ensure that your land remains unchanged.
- Benefit from your farmland's market value without giving it up to non-farm use.
- Protect the community food and water supply.
- Preserve wildlife habitat.

This recorded deed allows you to retain ownership of the property while giving up certain rights through sale or donation.

## How can it help me?

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits.

Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities.

Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) protect the long-term viability of the nation's food

supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Land protected by agricultural land easements offers additional public benefits, including environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat and protection of open space.

### Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a WRE.

With WRE, NRCS may enroll eligible land through:

- *Permanent Easements*  
NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement in perpetuity, and 75 to 100 percent of the restoration costs.



Virginia is losing an average of 12,000+ acres to development each year. Landowners can protect these vital farm- and wetlands through conservation easements with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.



## Your Bundle of Sticks

Imagine holding a bundle of sticks that represent the rights to sell, farm, hunt, timber, construct buildings, or restrict access to your land.

When you place a conservation easement on a property, you hand a few of those "sticks" to another party (such as USDA-NRCS) to hold in trust permanently or for a term of years (term easement).

The other party usually cannot exercise these rights but simply preserves them for the public good, thereby "restricting" their use.

These restrictions could include limiting the right to subdivide the land, build houses or stores, or cut timber in a wetland.

- **30-Year Easements**  
NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement for 30 years, and 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

With WRE, NRCS pays all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, survey and appraisal fees, and title insurance.

### **Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)**

NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing ALEs that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land. In the case of working farms, the program helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture.

The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including pastureland and shrubland. Eligible partners include state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland or grassland protection programs.

Under the ALE component, NRCS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market easement value. Where NRCS determines that grasslands of special environmental significance will be protected, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.

### **Eligibility**

Land eligible for WRE includes farmed or converted wetland that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. NRCS will prioritize applications based on the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for wildlife.

To enroll land through WRE, NRCS enters into purchase agreements with eligible private landowners that include the right for NRCS to develop and implement a wetland restoration plan. This plan restores,



NRCS makes a site visit to determine whether the land is eligible for a Wetland Reserve Easement.

protects, and enhances the wetland's functions and values.

Land eligible for ALE includes crop-land, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forest land. NRCS will prioritize applications that protect agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize the protection of contiguous acres devoted to agricultural use.

To enroll land through ALE, NRCS enters into cooperative agreements with eligible partner organizations. Each easement is required to have an agricultural land easement plan that promotes the long-term viability of the land.

### **How to apply**

*Wetland Reserve Easements:* Landowners may apply at any time at a local USDA Service Center.

*Agricultural Land Easements:* Eligible partners may submit proposals to NRCS to acquire conservation easements on eligible land.

### **Learn more**

For more information, visit your local USDA Service Center or the NRCS Farm Bill website at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill).

### **Find your local USDA Service Center**

<http://offices.usda.gov>



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