USDA-NRCS IN GEORGIA ANNOUNCES SIGNUP FOR CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

ATHENS, GA, September 30, 2021 — State Conservationist Terrance O. Rudolph, for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Georgia today announced a sign-up for this year’s Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). To be considered for the fiscal year 2022 funding pool, applications must be submitted by November 5, 2021.

The ACEP, created through the 2014 Farm Bill and reauthorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, is a program that has two components, known as Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE).

“ACEP is another tool NRCS has to help all different types of landowners find the right conservation solution for them,” said Rudolph. “We understand not all programs appeal the same to everyone, but we do want all groups- tribes, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and private landowners- to know that we work for them, and together we can find a solution to their conservation challenges.”

ACEP-WRE applications are accepted directly from producers on eligible lands. These easements will restore and enhance wetlands and improve habitat. Eligible lands include farmed, prior converted or forested wetlands that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. Applications will be ranked according to the easement’s potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds, fish and other wildlife.

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.

In the 2018 Farm Bill rules, there is an option available under ACEP-ALE for the use of ACEP-ALE program agreements, versus the traditional cooperative agreement. ACEP-ALE program agreements are designed to streamline ACEP-ALE enrollments and allow for fiscal year-round evaluation, selection, and funding of individual parcels.

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The latest version of the ACEP-ALE application allows the eligible entity to identify which ALE-agreement type they are interested in. Approved ACEP-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.

All applications must be submitted to Georgia NRCS by November 5, 2021 for both ACEP-ALE and ACEP-WRE. Conservation program applications are available at your local USDA Service Center and at our Programs web page.

NRCS provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain and improve our natural resources and environment. More information on NRCS conservation programs can be found at https://www.farmers.gov/ or https://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov under the Programs tab.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation’s lands, biodiversity and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA and our agencies to pursue a coordinated approach alongside USDA stakeholders, including State, local and Tribal governments.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

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