United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service offers voluntary Farm Bill programs that benefit both agricultural producers and the environment.

Overview

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) helps landowners, land trusts, and other entities protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, grasslands, and working farms and ranches through conservation easements.

Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps American Indian tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land.

Under the Wetland Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps to restore, protect, and enhance enrolled wetlands.

Benefits

Agricultural Land Easements 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 provides additional public benefits, including enhanced environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat, and protection of open space.

Wetland Reserve Easements 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 non-developed recreational activities.

Agricultural Land Easements

NRCS provides financial assistance to partners for purchasing Agricultural Land Easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of land. The program helps farmers and ranchers keep working farms in agriculture. Eligible partners include American Indian tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations that have farmland or grassland protection programs.

Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement. 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.

Wetland Reserve Easements

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and American Indian tribes to restore, enhance, and protect wetlands through the purchase of a wetland reserve easement. For acreage owned by an American Indian tribe, there is an additional enrollment option of a 30-year contract.

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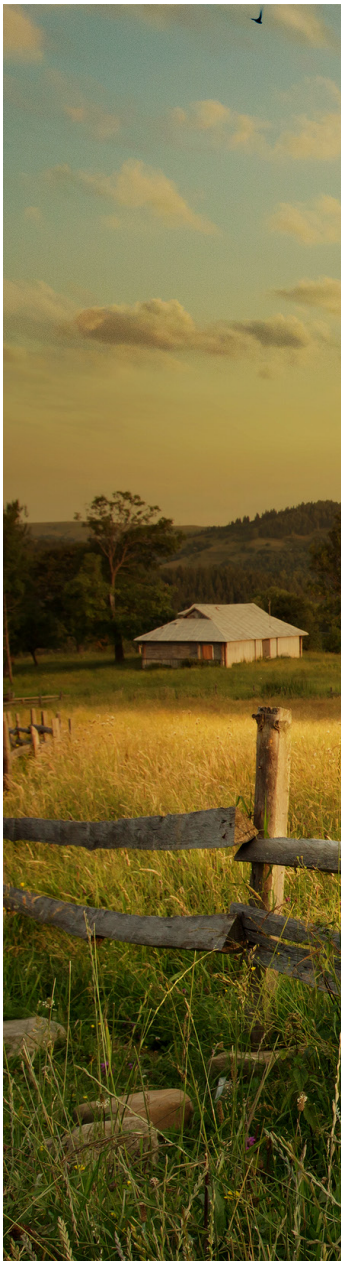

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Through the wetland reserve enrollment options, NRCS may enroll eligible land through:

- Permanent Easements are conservation easements in perpetuity. NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement, and 75 to 100 percent of the restoration costs.
- 30-Year Easements expire after 30 years. Under 30-year easements, NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement, and 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.
- Term Easements are easements that are for the maximum duration allowed under applicable state laws. NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the term easement and between 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.
- 30-Year Contracts are only available to enroll acreage owned by Indian tribes. Program payment rates are commensurate with 30-year easements.

For Wetland Reserve Easements, NRCS pays all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, charges for abstracts, survey and appraisal fees, and title insurance.

Who is Eligible?

Land eligible for Agricultural Land Easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and nonindustrial private forest land associated with an agricultural operation. 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 Agricultural Land Easements, NRCS enters into agreements with eligible partners.

Land eligible for Wetland Reserve Easements includes farmed or converted wetlands that have been previously altered for agricultural production that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. NRCS will prioritize applications based on the easement's potential for improving water quality and protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

To enroll land through Wetland Reserve Easements, NRCS enters into purchase agreements with eligible private landowners or American Indian tribes. NRCS and the landowner work together to develop and implement a wetland reserve plan to guide the restoration easement process. This plan restores, enhances, and protects the wetland's functions and values.

More Information

For more information, visit **nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill** or **farmers.gov**.

Find your local USDA Service Center at **farmers.gov/service-locator**.

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