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Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program Final Rule Streamlines Conservation Easement Acquisition Process

Public comments will be accepted through Feb. 23, 2011 on easement process

WASHINGTON, January 24, 2011—USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today issued the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) final rule, which will make protecting important farm and ranch lands easier. Earlier this year, NRCS released the National Resources Inventory, which reported that 40 million acres of agricultural and forested land – 1.6 million acres per year – were developed between 1982 and 2007.

With land being taken out of production at its current rate, NRCS sought advice from landowners and partners on simplifying the easement process. The final FRPP rule reflects that input. Under the final rule, partners, or certified cooperating entities can now purchase development rights from a landowner through a streamlined process. Changes to the rule will make it possible for more entities to be certified and give them greater flexibility to manage the easement process.

“Certified cooperating entities have consistently demonstrated their abilities to independently manage the easement process,” said NRCS Chief Dave White. “Our shared goal is maintaining and preserving working farms and ranches, and the new rule makes it easier to achieve that goal.”

FRPP and similar programs play an important role in protecting private agricultural land from development. FRPP provides matching funds to help state, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements on private working lands. Lands eligible for FRPP include cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, forestland and incidental lands that are part of an agricultural operation. Since the beginning of the program in 1996, NRCS has worked with partners to enroll 808,155 acres in FRPP.

The final rule is now in effect; however, NRCS is providing an additional 30-day public comment period for the changes made to the easement process. Comments can be submitted through Feb. 23, 2011 to Mark Rose, FRPP Program Manager, Easement Programs Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Post Office Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013; Fax: (202) 720-9689; E-mail: mark.rose@wdc.usda.gov.

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To view the final rule, go to www.regulations.gov or the Federal Register at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>. For more information about NRCS conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov, or go to your nearest USDA Service Center.

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