

## Grants offered to protect ag land

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The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has announced that \$1.1 million will be available through the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) to protect agricultural land in Nebraska.

Nebraska conservation partner organizations and land preservation groups have until April 1 to apply.

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program is a voluntary program that provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural uses. Working through existing local farmland protection programs, USDA enters into a cooperative agreement with State, tribal, local governments, or nongovernmental organizations to acquire perpetual conservation easements from landowners.

The easement allows landowners to continue agricultural operations, and the land remains the private property of the landowner. The land also remains on tax rolls.

This program was originally intended to assist with urban sprawl around densely populated urban areas, but in Nebraska, the program has been valuable in protecting historically significant, culturally unique and wild and scenic places from development.

NRCS is seeking proposals from organizations interested in acquiring conservation easements on farms and ranches. Applications may be submitted at anytime, but must be received by April 1 to be considered for fiscal year 2012 funding. Proposals should be sent with attention to: Craig Derickson, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 100 Centennial Mall North, Federal Building Rm. 152, Lincoln, NE 68508.

To participate in FRPP landowners agree to limit the use of their land for nonagricultural purposes. Landowners keep possession of their land, and work with NRCS to develop and implement a conservation plan.

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Eligible proposals will be ranked on the following factors:

Percentage of prime, unique, and important farmland in the parcel to be protected;

Percentage of cropland, pastureland, grassland, and rangeland in the parcel to be protected;

Ratio of the total acreage of land in the parcel to be protected to average farm size in the county;

Decrease in the percentage of acreage of farm and ranch land in the county in which the parcel is located;

Percent of population growth in the county;

Population density;

Proximity of the parcel to other protected land; and

Proximity of the parcel to other agricultural operations and infrastructure.

The eligible farm or ranch must have the following components:

Contain productive soils or historic or archaeological sites;

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Furthers a state or local policy consistent with the purposes of the program;

Be part of a pending offer from a nongovernmental organization, State, Tribe, or local farmland protection program;

Privately owned;

Covered by a conservation plan, and;

Large enough to sustain agricultural production, or serve as a buffer to protect an agricultural operation from development.

For more information about FRPP please contact Randy Epperson at 402-437-4048 or visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp>.