



**Natural Resources
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NRCS to provide \$500,000 to protect and restore agricultural working lands, grasslands and wetlands in Alabama

Auburn, Ala., April 7, 2015 – United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Alabama is making up to \$500,000 available in financial and technical assistance through the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) (ACEP). NRCS is making \$332 million in financial and technical assistance available nationwide to help productive farm and ranch lands remain in agriculture and to protect the nation’s critical wetlands and grasslands. Private landowners, American Indian tribes and eligible entities are encouraged to apply by May 15, 2015.

“NRCS helps farmers, ranchers, private forest landowners and partners to achieve their conservation goals using our technical expertise, Farm Bill funding and sound conservation planning,” Dr. William E. Puckett said. “Conservation easements are an important tool to help these landowners and partners voluntarily provide long-term protection of our nation’s farmland, rangeland, wetlands and grasslands for future generations.”

The 2014 Farm Bill consolidated three previous conservation easement programs into ACEP to make it easier for diverse agricultural landowners to fully benefit from conservation initiatives. NRCS easement programs have been a critical tool in recent years for advancing landscape-scale private lands conservation.

In fiscal year 2014, NRCS in Alabama used more than \$643,975 in ACEP funding to enroll an estimated 220 acres of farmland, rangeland, grassland and wetlands through two new easements. In FY 2014 nationally, NRCS enrolled an estimated 145,000 acres of farmland, rangeland, grassland and wetlands to be protected through 485 easements.

ACEP’s agricultural land easements not only protect the long-term viability of the nation’s food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses, but they also support environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat and protection of open spaces.

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American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland or grassland protection programs are eligible to partner with NRCS to purchase conservation easements. A key change under the new agricultural land easement component is the new “grasslands of special environmental significance that will protect high-quality grasslands under threat of conversion to cropping, urban development and other non-grazing uses.

Wetland reserve easements allow landowners to successfully enhance and protect habitat for wildlife on their lands, reduce impacts from flooding, recharge groundwater and provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private and tribal landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through the purchase of these easements. Eligible landowners can choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement; tribal landowners also have the option of enrolling in 340-year contracts.

ACEP applications are currently being accepted for both agricultural land and wetlands reserve easements. Applications are available at local [USDA Service Centers](#). To learn more about ACEP and other technical and financial assistance available through NRCS conservation programs, visit www.al.nrcs.usda.gov to learn more about technical and financial assistance available through other NRCS programs nationally, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or your [local USDA Service Center](#).

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