



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

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New Partnership will Protect an Ecological Jewel for Research

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in Alabama collaborates with The Nature Conservancy, Auburn University Real Estate Foundation, and Alabama Cooperative Extension System to directly impact student interests in agriculture and environmental sciences.

Auburn, Ala., April 28, 2015 – Green rolls of open hills speckled with lines of strong Alabama soil will soon serve as a teaching farm for Auburn University and Alabama A&M students. The 491 acre Graham farm is located in Jackson County, Alabama adjacent to the Paint Rock River. The signing ceremony to establish a working farm easement is scheduled on Wednesday, April 29, 2015 at 10:45 a.m. in the Gilmer Board Room at the Auburn Alumni Center, 317 South College Street, Auburn, Alabama 36849.

“Opportunities to partner with other agencies committed to conservation are invaluable to helping us help the land. Through the [Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program](#), we have been able to protect the Graham property and this will benefit the entire state by allowing students interested in learning more about agriculture to visit the farm for research,” said state conservationist for Alabama Dr. William E. Puckett.

Furthermore, the 265-acre conservation easement will protect open space and safeguard agricultural production in perpetuity. The generous donation of the Graham family to the Auburn University Real Estate Foundation led to this public, private opportunity.

“This agreement will play a direct role in the education and development of student interests in agriculture and environmental sciences,” said Chris Oberholster, state director of The Nature Conservancy in Alabama. “A conservation easement will ensure protection of the tremendous ecological value of the property.”

“The Auburn University Real Estate Foundation is pleased to partner with the Nature Conservancy and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to protect and preserve this important farmland for teaching and research,” said Jane DiFolco Parker, Auburn University Foundation President and Vice President for Development.

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Dr. Gary Lemme, director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System said, “We are pleased that this agreement will allow the Graham Farm’s mission to remain focused on the wise stewardship of our natural resources. The Graham Farm will be a valuable resource for students and others interested in learning more about agriculture and natural resource conservation.”

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), which is now the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Agricultural Land Easements \(ACEP-ALE\)](#) under the new 2014 Farm Bill, provided matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and ranchland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA partners with State, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. USDA provided up to 50 percent of the fair market easement value of the conservation easement.

For more on technical and financial assistance available through NRCS’ conservation programs, please visit www.al.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or a [local USDA service center](#).

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