

In an effort to protect agricultural land in Nebraska, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that \$800,000 will be available to successful applicants through the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

Nebraska conservation partners and land preservation groups have until Feb. 1, 2011 to apply.

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program is a voluntary program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture while preventing conversion of the land to nonagricultural uses.

FRPP provides matching funds to existing farmland preservation programs, such as Land Trusts, state, or local government programs.

These programs then purchase the development rights from farmers and ranchers and place an agricultural easement on the land.

The land remains in the farmer's or rancher's hands, but the development pressure is reduced because the perpetual easement keeps the land in agricultural use.

NRCS is seeking proposals from organizations interested in acquiring conservation easements on farms and ranches.

Applications may be submitted at any time, but must be received by Feb. 1, 2011 to be considered for fiscal year 2011 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.

This program provides matching funds to organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements. Landowners may also contribute up to 25 percent of the matching funds.

NRCS may provide up to 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement.

The entities purchase perpetual easements from landowners in exchange for a lump sum payment, not to exceed the appraised fair market value of the land's development rights.

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.

Eligible proposals will be ranked on the following factors:

- Percent of prime, unique, and important farmland in the parcel to be protected;
- Percent 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;
- 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>.