



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Rhode Island State Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

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Applications to Protect Farm and Ranch Lands Sought With Over \$4.0 Million Available- Ranking Deadline February 5, 2010

WARWICK, RI (December 4, 2009) — To help protect working agricultural lands in Rhode Island, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced that over \$4 million will be available to successful applicants this year through the agency's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

There is a continuous, year-round sign-up for the program, but February 5, 2010 has been set as the deadline for evaluating applications for this year's funding.

"This program can help communities preserve farm or ranch land and cultural resources," said Pooh Vongkhamdy, NRCS State Conservationist. "It's an excellent way to keep prime farmland in agriculture and, at the same time, keep farming and ranching communities thriving by relieving development pressures," he said.

Since its inception in 1996, about 3,000 acres of Rhode Island's farm and ranch lands have been enrolled in the program. Last year, Rhode Island received \$5.3 million in funding, enough to enroll nearly 245 acres on 7 parcels of land.

"Interested land owners need to contact an eligible entity that would pay 50 percent of the easement cost," Vongkhamdy said. However, to be considered for funding, the application needs to identify an entity with the capability to acquire easements, he said.

"That entity applies and nominates a parcel that has a pending offer of value at the time of application," Vongkhamdy said. "If they do not have a pending offer from a land owner in writing at the time of application, the application will not be eligible for ranking."

NRCS is seeking proposals from local, State and Federally recognized Tribal governments and non-governmental organizations interested in working together to acquire conservation easements on farms and ranches. Proposals should be sent to Mike Moorman at NRCS, 60 Quaker Lane, Suite 46, Warwick, RI 02886. Applications postmarked or received by the close of business Friday, February 5, 2010 will be ranked and considered for funding. Final project selections are expected to be announced by March 1, 2010.

FRPP protects productive agricultural land by providing funds to cooperating entities to purchase conservation easements that limit conversion of farm and ranch lands to non-agricultural uses. NRCS provides up to 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement in this voluntary program. State, Tribal and local entities can match that amount and they can include landowner donations in their match.

To be eligible for the program a farm or ranch must have the following components:

- Contain productive soils or historic or archaeological sites;
- Be part of a pending offer from a non-governmental organization, State, Tribe or local farmland protection program;
- Be privately owned;
- Covered by a conservation plan;
- Large enough to sustain agricultural production;
- No more than 66 percent forested land with at least 33 percent active agriculture.

For more information on FRPP, please visit <http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov> or contact Mike Moorman at (401) 822-8848.