

For Immediate Release

BISMARCK, ND ----- Landowners with agricultural lands subject to frequent flooding have an opportunity to minimize flood risks and reduce economic losses to their property. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide up to \$145 million to eligible landowners nationwide through the floodplain easement component of its Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced. The funds will be used to restore an estimated 60,000 acres of frequently flooded land to its natural state and create jobs. This program is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

This floodplain easement requires landowners to discontinue the production of agricultural commodities. The easement allows compatible haying, grazing, or silviculture according to conditions as they relate to timing, intensity, and duration, while the United States acquires all other land use, development, and hydrology rights.

“Floodplain easements allow landowners to make wise choices about land use for both economic potential and the protection of natural resources, according to JR FLORES, State Conservationist for NRCS. The EWP Program assists them in accomplishing those goals, he added.”

The EWP Program’s floodplain easement component allows NRCS to purchase easements on lands damaged by flooding. The restored floodplain will generate many public

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benefits, such as increased flood protection, enhanced fish and wildlife habitat, improved water quality, and a reduced need for future public disaster assistance. Other benefits include reduced energy consumption when certain agricultural activities and practices are eliminated and increased carbon sequestration as permanent vegetative cover is re-established.

In the past, the EWP Program has provided over \$11 million of financial and technical assistance on 15,000 acres to individuals and communities in North Dakota affected by natural disasters such as floods. This program allows for the purchase for floodplain easements.

All of North Dakota's watersheds are eligible for EWP-FPE easements. Eligible participants will compete nationally for funds, and be accepted on economic and environmental benefits per federal dollar spent. Applications will be accepted until close of business (COB) March 27, 2009. Eligible areas include low-lands that are primarily cropland, grazing land, hayland, or forest land next to a river or watercourse that is subject to repeated flood damage.

Eligible areas may pay up to 100 percent of land value for a floodplain. Future development will be restricted on all easements, and in no case will participants be eligible for future federal flood disaster assistance on the easement property.

For more information, contact your local NRCS office located in the USDA Service Center.

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