



Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **2016 Conservation Easement Applications due January 15**

**DAVIS**, Calif., Dec. 2, 2015 – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in California is now accepting applications for both Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) and Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). Created in the 2014 Farm Bill, the program encompasses protection of farms and ranches through ALE and protection and restoration of wetlands through WRE. Applications for available funding are due no later than January 15, 2016.

"The benefits of restoring, enhancing and protecting working agricultural lands and wetlands are critical in California – especially in a time of ongoing drought," said Carlos Suarez, NRCS California state conservationist. "Protecting and enhancing these lands provides sustainable benefits for California's agricultural landscape."

ALE funds are available to land trusts, non-governmental organizations, local and state governments, and tribes that have existing programs to purchase conservation easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of privately owned land. Cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forestland are all eligible land uses. Approved agricultural easements would prevent productive working lands from being converted to non-agricultural uses and maximize protection of land devoted to food production. For 2016, California NRCS received \$4,396,000 in funding to protect farms and ranches, and an additional \$4,486,000 to protect ranches that provide habitat for the greater sage grouse – an at-risk species. These funds must be matched with non-federal dollars.

WRE is a voluntary easement option that provides farmers, ranchers and other private landowners compensation for land placed in wetland conservation easements, and cost-share funding for restoring degraded wetlands. WRE includes permanent easements that pay 100 percent of the easement value and restoration costs, and 30-year easements that pay up to 75 percent of the easement value and restoration costs. For 2016, California NRCS received \$10,880,000 to protect and restore privately owned wetlands.

Interested landowners are encouraged to contact their local NRCS service center. Learn more about ACEP by visiting [www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs).

Since its inception in 1935, NRCS has worked in partnership with private landowners and a variety of local, state and federal conservation partners to deliver conservation based on specific, local needs.

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