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## **NRCS Provides \$328 Million For Agricultural and Wetland Easements**

*Indianapolis, IN, September 8, 2014* – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said today the Department of Agriculture is investing \$328 million to help private landowners protect and restore key farmlands, grasslands and wetlands. \$3.4 million of this will be available in Indiana. The 2014 Farm Bill created the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) to protect critical wetlands and keep lands in farming for the future.

“Conservation easements help Hoosier farmers protect valuable agricultural lands from development while enhancing lands best suited for grazing and wetlands to their natural conditions,” Jane Hardisty, Indiana’s State Conservationist said. “These easements are making a dramatic and positive impact for food supply, rural communities, and species habitat.”

The program’s first signup resulted in 1,450 applications requesting more than \$546 million in funding to restore and protect more than 345,000 acres through easements. Out of those applications, about 380 of the top easement projects were selected to protect and restore 32,000 acres of prime farmland, 45,000 acres of grasslands and 52,000 acres of wetlands.

Through ACEP, private landowners or eligible conservation partners working with landowners can request assistance from NRCS to protect and enhance agricultural land through an agricultural easement or restore and protect wetlands through a wetland easement.

These easements deliver many benefits over the long term, for example, improving water quality and wetland storage capacity and protecting prime farmland under high risk of development near urban areas to help secure the nation’s food supply and jobs in the agricultural sector.

ACEP consolidates three former NRCS easement programs – Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Grasslands Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Program – into two components – one that protects farmlands and grasslands and another that protects and restores agricultural wetlands.

“The 2014 Farm Bill streamlined USDA’s major easement programs into one, putting the important benefits of protecting farmlands, grasslands and wetlands all under one roof to make it as easy as possible for landowners to participate,” Hardisty said.

Find more information about ACEP on our website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/in/programs/?cid=stelprdb1248149>. To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted) or contact your Indiana NRCS District Conservationist <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.

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