

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 10, 2015

## **Tennessee Agricultural Producers Urged to Apply for ACEP Program by January 15, 2016**

### *Other funds available for Wetland Protection*

**NASHVILLE** – Tennessee producers are urged to apply for ACEP program by January 15, 2016. Funds are available to help landowners protect and restore key farmlands, grasslands and wetlands across the nation. The funding is provided through the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) (ACEP), created by the 2014 Farm Bill to protect critical water resources and wildlife habitat, and encourage private owners to maintain land for farming and ranching. Through the voluntary sale of an easement, landowners limit future development of farms, wetlands and grasslands.

ACEP's agricultural land easements not only protect the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses, they also support environmental quality, wildlife habitat, historic preservation and protection of open spaces. Native American Tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland or grassland protection programs are eligible to partner with NRCS to purchase conservation easements.

“NRCS helps farmers, ranchers, private forest landowners and partners to achieve their conservation goals using our technical expertise, Farm Bill funding and sound conservation planning,” Kevin Brown, Tennessee State Conservationist, said. “Conservation easements are an important tool to help these landowners and partners voluntarily provide long-term protection of our nation’s farmland, ranchland, wetlands and grasslands for future generations.”

ACEP-ALE (Agricultural Land Easement), Tennessee has over \$300,000 available in matching funds.

NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing Agricultural Land Easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land. In the case of working farms, the program helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including rangeland, pastureland and shrubland. Eligible partners include Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland or grassland protection programs.

Under the Agricultural Land component, NRCS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement. Where NRCS determines that grasslands of

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special environmental significance will be protected, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.

ACEP-WRE (Wetland Reserve Easement), funds are available in Tennessee under the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI). \$6 million in funding is available for the unprotected lands along the Mississippi River. Almost \$2 million is available for the general signup.

NRCS has purchased 295 wetland easements in Tennessee covering 43,524 acres in 38 counties. Tennessee has over 6,800 acres of flood damaged property along the Mississippi River which has been placed under Wetland Easements creating valuable habitat to migratory species and reducing the risk of crop losses due to flooding, among a host of other benefits.

Wetland reserve easements allow landowners to successfully restore, enhance and protect habitat for wildlife on their lands, reduce damage from flooding, recharge groundwater and provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities. Eligible landowners can choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement.

In FY 2014 and FY 2015, NRCS invested more than \$600 million in ACEP funding to help landowners engage in voluntary conservation to provide long-term protection of an estimated 250,000 acres of farmland, grassland, and wetlands through more than 750 new easements. To learn about ACEP and other technical and financial assistance available through NRCS conservation programs, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted) or your [local USDA Service Center](#). You may also contact Laura Persinger, Realty Specialist, at (615) 277-2597. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps America's farmers and ranchers conserve the Nation's soil, water, air and other natural resources. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment.

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