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2012 Conservation Easement Applications due February 15

\$5.8 million available for grassland and farmland conservation programs in California

DAVIS, Calif., Jan. 11, 2012 – Private landowners interested in protecting their grassland or farmland with this year’s funding are encouraged get their applications in soon. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in California has set Feb. 15, 2012, as the deadline for accepting applications for both the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

“These programs provide landowners an opportunity to protect farm and ranch lands in a way that keeps working land in production, preserves open space, and provides great benefit to our state’s natural resources and wildlife,” said Ed Burton, NRCS State Conservationist in California.

FRPP is a voluntary easement program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agricultural production. The program provides matching funds to State, Tribal, or local governments and nongovernmental organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements. These permanent easements protect agricultural land, and important farmland soils, by prohibiting conversion to non-agricultural uses.

GRP is a voluntary easement program that helps ranchers protect the agricultural viability of grazing landscapes and their associated environmental benefits. Working cooperatively with NRCS, GRP participants implement grazing plans that benefit natural resources such as wildlife habitat, water quality, plant diversity, forage productivity and soil quality which collectively influence watershed health. GRP targets grasslands of high biological value that are vulnerable to conversion to urban uses, cropland, or other non-grazing uses and conserves them through perpetual easements, or 10, 15, or 20-year rental agreements.

While NRCS accepts both FRPP and GRP applications throughout the year, the agency plans to make 2012 funding decisions from the pool of applications received by February 15. These programs have the same February 15 deadline as the Wetlands Reserve Program, the third conservation easement program authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill, and managed by NRCS. As with all NRCS easements, the landowner retains the title to the land, and the right to control access and recreational use. The land remains on the tax rolls.



Since 1996, NRCS has provided \$40 million on 75 farms across the state, and leveraged an additional \$66 million from landowners and partners, for a total investment of \$106 million through FRPP. Since 2003, GRP has provided \$10 million to conserve nearly 50,000 acres on 36 ranches using conservation leases and easements.

For more information on NRCS's easement programs, landowners can contact their local NRCS Service Center or visit 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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