



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Anita Zurbrugg, AFT, 815-753-9686, azurbrugg@niu.edu
or Al Sokolow, 530-752-0979, ajsokolow@ucdavis.edu

STUDY BROADENS KNOWLEDGE OF FARM CONSERVATION EASEMENTS Series of reports offers most comprehensive look at farmland protection programs to date

Washington, D.C., Oct. 2, 2003—A new study on agricultural easement programs finds that use of this land conservation tool is most prevalent in suburban and semi-rural parts of major metropolitan areas—counties with populations of more than 100,000 that have been experiencing rapid population growth for years.

A National View of Agricultural Easement Programs is the most in-depth and comprehensive analysis of agricultural easement programs undertaken in the United States. This report, the first in a series to be issued from the study, profiles 46 agricultural easement programs in 15 states—nearly half of all publicly funded farmland protection programs in the nation. The 46 programs studied have spent a total of \$1.8 billion to protect 887,000 acres on 5,800 farms. The study was done by American Farmland Trust and the Agricultural Issues Center, University of California, in collaboration with Farm Foundation.

“This study reveals a diversity of ways that farm conservation easement programs are conceived, managed and funded,” said project director Alvin D. Sokolow, University of California-Davis. “What all of the programs have in common, however, is that they were launched by a show of strong public support for farmland protection. This common conviction supported the bond issues, revenue measures and public deliberations needed to establish and maintain the programs.”

Agricultural easements allow landowners to sell the development rights on their farms to government or nonprofit organizations in exchange for agreeing to keep the land permanently available for agriculture. The use of farm easements has grown exponentially since the 1970s; today

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twenty-six states have at least one publicly funded easement program at the state or local level.

One interesting finding was that the cost of agricultural easements—generally the difference between the market and agricultural values of the land—varies tremendously. “The per acre cost of individual easement transactions ranges from a few hundred dollars in rural areas, to close to \$100,000 in a few metropolitan locations with intense development pressure,” Sokolow explained.

Although the average price of easements for all 46 programs studied was approximately \$2,000 per acre, the report explains that easements are often worth far more than their price tags. “Donations by landowners for tax benefits can help lower the price of easements and sweeten the deal for communities wishing to protect farmland,” said Julia Freedgood, director of American Farmland Trust’s Technical Assistance Services.

Other key findings from the study are that agricultural easements:

- Are primarily funded by state and local governments, but federal matching funds are expected to increase sharply due to funding provided in the 2002 Farm Bill.
- Have potential to complement local planning and land use policies to protect farmland, but have not yet fulfilled their promise due to lack of coordination and limited planning policies in some communities.

The report, *A National View of Agricultural Easement Programs*, along with maps of land protected through most of the 46 programs studied, is available at www.farmland.org and www.farmfoundation.org. Additional reports from the study will address acquisition strategies, land use planning and the impacts and effectiveness of easement programs.

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American Farmland Trust is a national nonprofit organization working with communities and individuals to protect the best land, plan for growth with agriculture in mind and keep the land healthy. As the leading advocate for farm and ranch land conservation, AFT has ensured that more than a million acres stays bountiful and productive. AFT’s national office is located in Washington, D.C. Phone number is 202-331-7300. For more information, visit www.farmland.org.

Farm Foundation (www.farmfoundation.org) is a publicly-supported, nonprofit organization working to improve the economic health of agriculture and the well-being of people in rural America. It does this by exploring forces shaping the competitiveness of agriculture and the food system; encouraging application of research results to increase human capital; promoting informed dialogue on important public issues and policies; and building knowledge-based networks for U.S. agriculture and rural people.