



CONSERVATION FACT SHEET

United States Department of Agriculture

ACEP Agricultural Land Easements

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) is a subprogram of the USDA and is charged with protecting and conserving working farms through investing in farmers and ranchers to ensure their lands remain in agriculture. To do this, NRCS partners with nonprofit land conservation organizations and government agencies to support the purchase of conservation easements that protect working lands throughout North Carolina. Under the USDA ACEP Agriculture Land Easement program, NRCS may contribute up to 50% of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.

Eligibility

To apply for ACEP-ALE funding, landowners must be partnered with either a nonprofit land conservation organization or a government agency.

Applications are ranked based on certain characteristics that ensure NRCS is using funds efficiently to protect agricultural lands throughout the United States.

Minimal Eligibility Requirement for Proposed Land Include:

1. Land must be private or tribal agricultural land
2. Land must be subject to a written pending offer for purchase of an agricultural land easement by an eligible entity
3. Must meet one of the following
 - a. Contain at least 50% prime, unique or productive soil
 - b. Contain historical and/or archaeological resources
 - c. Enrolling land would further protect grazing uses
 - d. Protecting land will further a state or local policy consistent with the purposes of ACEP
4. Land must be one of the following types: cropland, rangeland, grassland, located in areas historically dominated by grasslands, pasturelands, and nonindustrial private forest lands
5. Located in areas with access to agricultural markets for products and/or infrastructure appropriate for supporting agricultural production



5. Lands must be agricultural lands that face development pressures from nonagricultural uses or grasslands that face pressures of conversion

6. Eligible properties will have the following breakdown: 1/3 of the tract is designated as field or non-forested land (ex. cropland, pastureland, hay) and no more than 2/3 of the tract can be designated as forest

ALE will contribute 50% of the easement funding when matched with NCADFP funding.

Benefits

The ALE program's greatest strength is its ability to conserve farms, ranches and other types of land in perpetuity, ensuring the next generation has access to wildspaces and food production. The ALE program also makes agriculture more affordable by limiting development that would typically increase the price of nearby land. Other benefits include compensation for conservation practices and management strategies.

Application Process

Interested landowners must first find a land trust to partner with to submit the NRCS application through the NRCS NC State Office. Applications can be submitted at any time throughout the year, however, decisions are made at specifically noted times. For example, for funding in 2022, applications were continuously accepted until November 18th and decisions were released in January. Projects selected for funding are those with the highest ranking score.

More Information

USDA - Agricultural Land Easements

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/ale-agricultural-land-easements>

Land Trust Alliance - ACEP-ALE Eligibility

<https://landtrustalliance.org/resources/learn/explore/ale-toolkit/ale-eligibility>