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2012 Conservation Easement Applications Due February 10

\$5.5 million Available in Conservation Easement Funding for Maryland Landowners

Annapolis, Md., January 11, 2012– Private landowners interested in protecting their farmland or wetland with this year's funding are encouraged to get their applications in soon. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Maryland has set Feb. 10 as the deadline for 2012 first round funding consideration for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and Wetland Reserve Program.

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is a voluntary easement program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agricultural production. The program provides matching funds to state 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.

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial assistance to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. WRP helps to reduce flooding, improve water quality by filtering sediment and chemicals, recharge groundwater and more. In addition, these wetlands provide food and shelter for migratory birds and other wetland dependent species.

WRP offers landowners a combination of permanent or 30-year easements, in addition to 10-year restoration agreements, in exchange for retiring and restoring drained woodland and marginal land from agriculture. In 2012, landowners may receive up to \$8,170 per acre for permanent easements. For 30-year easements, applicants can receive 75 percent of the permanent easement value.

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NEWS RELEASE

For FRPP and WRP, USDA pays all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office. Landowners voluntarily limit future use of the land, yet retain private ownership.

While NRCS accepts easement program applications throughout the year, the agency plans to make 2012 funding decisions from the pool of applications received by Feb. 10 first. Subsequent ranking periods will occur until all funds are exhausted. Unfunded eligible applicants will remain on file until additional funding becomes available.

To participate in WRP, private landowners may submit applications directly to NRCS. For FRPP, state and local governments or nongovernmental organizations should submit applications directly to the NRCS State Office. Interested landowners are encouraged to contact their local USDA Service Center for more information. Service Center locations and more information on the programs can be found at www.md.nrcs.usda.gov.

NRCS's natural resources conservation programs help people reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by floods and other natural disasters. Public benefits include enhanced natural resources that help sustain agricultural productivity and environmental quality while supporting continued economic development, recreation, and scenic beauty.

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