

In an effort to protect working agricultural lands in Nebraska, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that \$1 million will be available to successful applicants through the agency's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

Nebraska conservation partners and land preservation groups have until May 15, 2009, to apply.

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) is a voluntary program that helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture while preventing the conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses.

"This program can help communities preserve farm or ranch land and cultural resources," Steve Chick, NRCS state conservationist, said.

"The program offers an excellent way to keep prime farmland in agriculture and, at the same time, keep farming and ranching communities thriving by relieving development pressures," he said.

NRCS is seeking proposals from organizations interested in working together to acquire conservation easements on farms and ranches. Applications may be submitted at anytime, but must be received by May 15 to be considered for fiscal year 2009 funding.

Proposals should be sent to Steve Chick at the NRCS state office, Federal Building, 100 Centennial Mall North, Rm. 152, Lincoln, NE 68508.

The program provides matching funds to organizations with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements. Landowners may also contribute up to 25 percent of the matching funds.

NRCS may provide up to 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement. The entities purchase perpetual easements from landowners in exchange for a lump sum payment, not to exceed the appraised fair market value of the land's development rights.

The NRCS has more details on the program.