



IMPACTS OF THE FEDERAL FARM AND RANCH LANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM: An Assessment Based on Interviews with Participating Landowners



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INTRODUCTION

America's working lands are at risk. In just 25 years, 23 million acres of farm and ranch land were converted to developed uses.¹ That's an area about the size of Indiana. Between 1982 and 2007, the nation also lost about 18 million acres of "other rural land," which included land devoted to farmsteads, agricultural structures and windbreaks, but primarily encompassed forest land—an integral part of commercial farms in some regions of the country. This period of unprecedented development accounts for more than one-third of all the land ever developed in the history of the United States.

And we converted relatively more of our best land—prime soils that require fewer inputs and are less prone to erosion.² Looking forward, land that grows our food is especially vulnerable. Ninety-one percent of fruits, tree nuts and berries and 78 percent of vegetables are produced in urban-influenced counties where development pressure is most intense.³

State and local governments have led the response to farmland loss, creating a range of policies and programs. A key approach is the use of agricultural conservation easements. Since 1977, 31 states have authorized purchase of agricultural conservation easement (PACE) programs to buy

easements from willing landowners to keep land available for agriculture. Twenty-seven states have active state-level programs, and at least 91 independently funded local PACE programs are active in 20 states.⁴ Private land trusts also protect farm and ranch land. Land trusts acquire or help other entities acquire land or conservation easements, and at least 192 have protected land for agriculture. Altogether, public programs and land trusts have protected 5 million acres of farm and ranch land nationwide.⁵

These efforts have been advanced by the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). The FRPP is a USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program that provides matching funds to state and local PACE programs, land trusts and tribal governments to buy conservation easements on farm and ranch land. To date the NRCS has invested about \$1.2 billion, contributing to the protection of nearly 1.1 million acres nationwide.⁶

Beyond these accomplishments, the NRCS, farmland protection advocates and policymakers sought evidence that the FRPP was achieving its stated purpose and delivering public benefits.⁷ More specifically, has the FRPP improved agricultural viability? Has the program spurred on-farm conservation? Does the FRPP help the next generation of farmers gain access to land? To answer these questions, American Farmland Trust (AFT), with support from the NRCS, initiated a study based on interviews with participating landowners. AFT collaborated with Dr. J. Dixon Esseks at the Center for Great Plains Studies of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to assess the impacts of the FRPP.

METHODS

To examine program outcomes, Dr. Esseks organized interviews with owners of land protected by conservation easements purchased in part with FRPP funds. AFT worked with Dr. Esseks to develop the questionnaire, coordinating input from the NRCS and selected public easement acquisition programs, land trusts and members of Congress. AFT also provided previous surveys of landowners enrolled in state farmland protection programs to help shape survey questions.

The scope of the study and limited availability of contact information barred a complete census. NRCS easement division staff supplied contact information for landowners who had protected their land between October 1, 2005, and January 2012. Dr. Esseks removed duplicates and then drew a series of random samples from a list of 1,156 unique landowners. Trained staff at the University's Bureau of Sociological Research conducted interviews with 506 landowners, achieving a 54 percent response rate. The randomly drawn sample is representative of the full list, and findings may be generalized to program participants during the same period.

Dr. Esseks compiled and analyzed the survey responses and prepared a full technical report. AFT drew selected findings for this summary. The full report is available on AFT's Farmland Information Center website: www.farmlandinfo.org.





CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPATING LANDOWNERS AND FARMS

Paths to Ownership of Protected Land

Participating landowners either sold an agricultural conservation easement, purchased protected land, inherited protected land or some combination of these paths. Eighty-eight percent had sold easements on their land and had not acquired protected land in any other way. Respondents who had acquired protected land exclusively through purchase or inheritance accounted for 3 percent and 0.4 percent of all respondents, respectively. Ninety-five percent of the surveyed landowners had sold easements on at least some of their protected agricultural land.

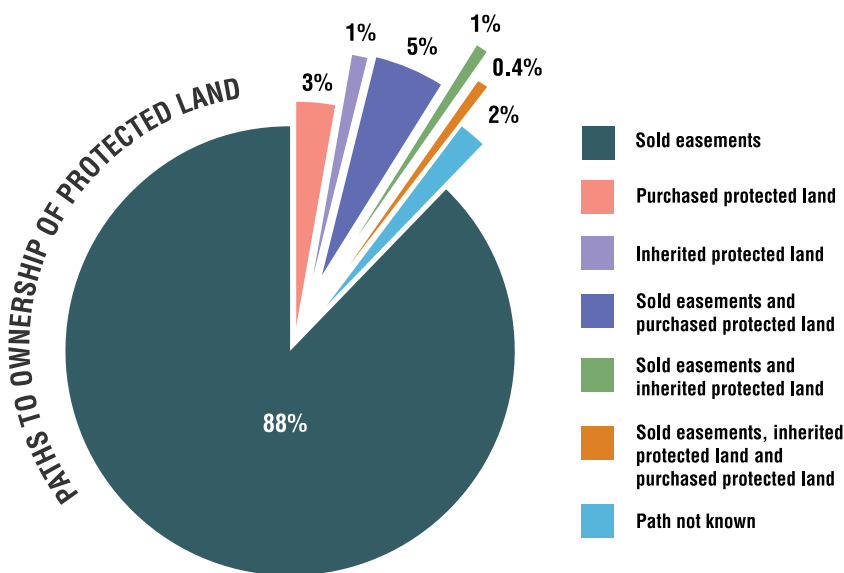
Landowner Demographics

Seventy-six percent of all respondents were men and 24 percent were women. Among the 356 owner-operators, 81 percent were men, and 19 percent were women. The percentage of women operators slightly outpaced the percentage of women principal operators reported in the 2007 Census of Agriculture (14 percent).

Seventy-one percent of the landowners who participated in the study were 56 or older; 41 percent were 66 or older. Only 25 percent were 36 to 55, and just 3 percent were 35 or younger.

Location of Farms and Ranches

Overall, the regional breakdown of survey participants tracks the distribution of program participants from the full list supplied by the NRCS. Interviews were conducted with 240 landowners from the Northeast, 67 from Appalachia, 56 from the Mountain States, 46 from the Corn Belt, 35 from the Pacific States, 30 from the Lake States, 20 from the Southeast, 10 from the Northern Plains and two from the Southern Plains.⁸



Farm Size

The average size of protected agricultural properties was 352 acres and the median was 140 acres. In comparison, the 2007 Census of Agriculture reported that the average farm size was 418 acres and the median was 80 acres.

Products Raised

Among the 356 owner-operators, 84 percent raised field crops such as corn, soybeans, wheat, vegetables and hay and 64 percent used their land for pasture or rangeland for livestock. Other common uses included non-harvested cropland (24 percent), wooded acres that produce timber products or maple syrup (19 percent), fruits, nursery or greenhouse crops (11 percent) and energy crops like switchgrass, wheat straw and maize (5 percent).

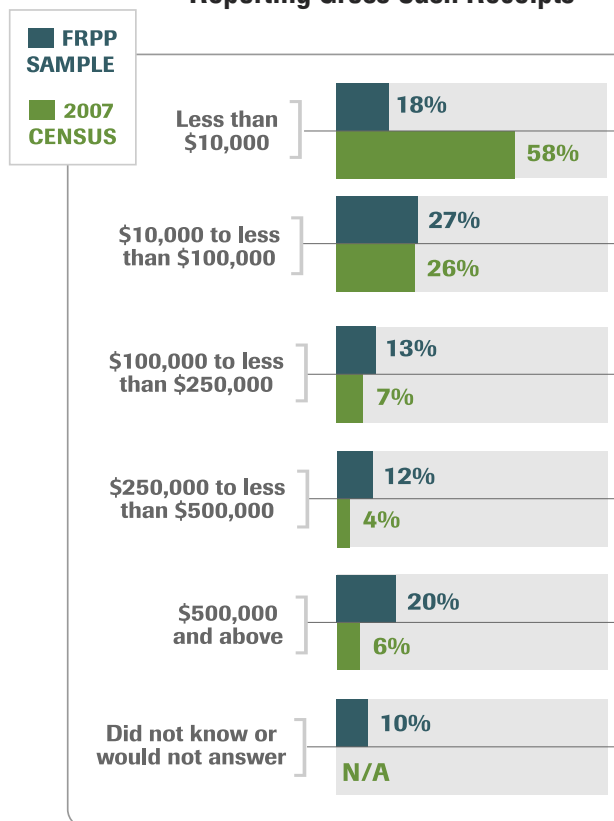
Sales

Gross sales reported by the owner-operators were higher on a proportional basis than sales reported in the 2007 Census of Agriculture. Relatively more operations among the FRPP sample fell in the three higher sales ranges, and a smaller proportion of the FRPP sample reported operations generating less than \$10,000 in annual revenue.

Direct Marketing

Among owner-operators, 42 percent reported that they have marketed agricultural products directly to consumers. Forty percent have sold goods to individuals, 9 percent directly to groups of consumers (at restaurants, schools and hospitals) and 7 percent to both. More than one-quarter (26 percent) of the owner-operators surveyed directly marketed *food* to consumers. By way of comparison, only 6 percent of the nation's 2.2 million operators sold food items directly to consumers according to the 2007 Census of Agriculture.

Percentage of Operators Reporting Gross Cash Receipts





FINDINGS

I. FRPP KEEPS LAND AVAILABLE FOR AGRICULTURE

Most FRPP-protected land is in active production; 96 percent of landowners said that at least some of their protected acreage was in active agricultural use. Eighty-five percent reported that at least half of their conserved acres were in active agricultural use, and 70 percent reported at least three-quarters were being farmed. Nearly half (48 percent) reported that all of their easement land was in production in 2011. The Mountain States had the highest share of owners of protected properties (71 percent) reporting all of their land in agricultural production.

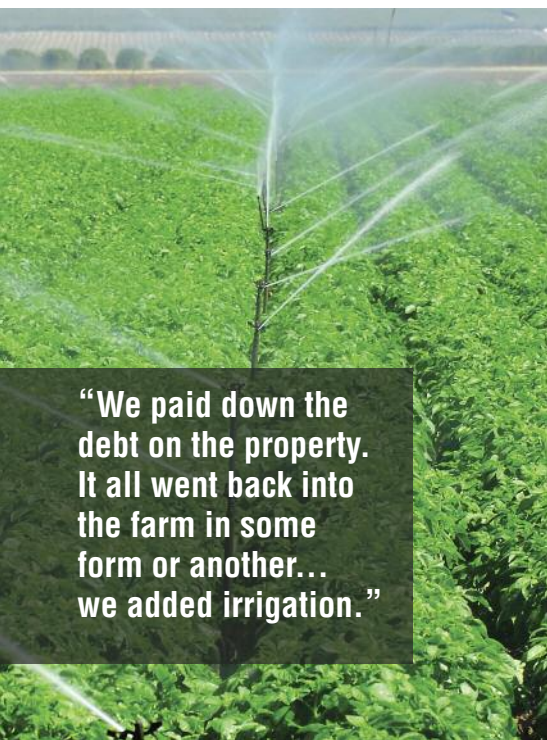
Because wooded areas used to raise agricultural products like Christmas trees, maple syrup or timber were not included, these findings likely undercount agricultural use in regions where significant proportions of active farms are forested. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, woodland accounts for 25 percent of all farmland in the Northeast, and

for five of the 11 Northeastern states, woodland comprises more than 40 percent of total agricultural acres. Wooded land can be enrolled in the FRPP subject to certain limits.⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that tree-covered regions like the Northeast and Appalachia appear to have relatively less active agricultural production occurring on FRPP-protected farms.

What's more, 70 percent of the surveyed owners are farmers or ranchers. The proportion of operators is even higher among respondents who *purchased* protected farms:

- 75 percent of respondents who only purchased protected land were operators;
- 92 percent of individuals who sold an easement and purchased protected land were operators; and
- The two individuals who sold easements, inherited protected land *and* purchased protected land were both operators.

These results confirm that protected land remains available to bona fide producers for agriculture, even among subsequent owners.



“We paid down the debt on the property. It all went back into the farm in some form or another... we added irrigation.”

Percentage of Protected Properties by Proportion in Agricultural Use and Farm Production Region

Farm Production Region	0%	More than 0% to less than 25%	25% to less than 50%	50% to less than 75%	75% to less than 100%	100%
Appalachia	8%	0%	6%	19%	24%	43%
Corn Belt	4%	0%	4%	2%	33%	57%
Lake States	0%	3%	3%	10%	40%	43%
Mountain States	3%	2%	2%	4%	18%	71%
Southeast	5%	0%	5%	5%	30%	55%
Northeast	3%	6%	11%	23%	18%	39%
Northern & Southern Plains	8%	8%	0%	8%	17%	58%
Pacific States	6%	0%	3%	6%	20%	66%
All Respondents	4%	4%	7%	15%	22%	48%

II. FRPP IMPROVES AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY

The FRPP supports agricultural viability in several ways. First, it provides liquid capital for farmers to invest in their operations. Eighty-four percent of landowners who sold easements on their land spent at least some of the proceeds for agricultural purposes. Nearly half used the money to construct, expand or repair agricultural buildings or structures including barns, silos, greenhouses, storage sheds, fences or buildings to process or market agricultural products. More than a third used the proceeds to repay loans on agricultural land they already owned. Twenty percent of owners who sold easements used funds to install or expand conservation practices.

Close to two-thirds (65 percent) ranked an agricultural purpose as either their first or second largest expenditure. More than half reported that spending related to agriculture represented their *largest* expenditure. The average easement payment received by these landowners was \$535,287.

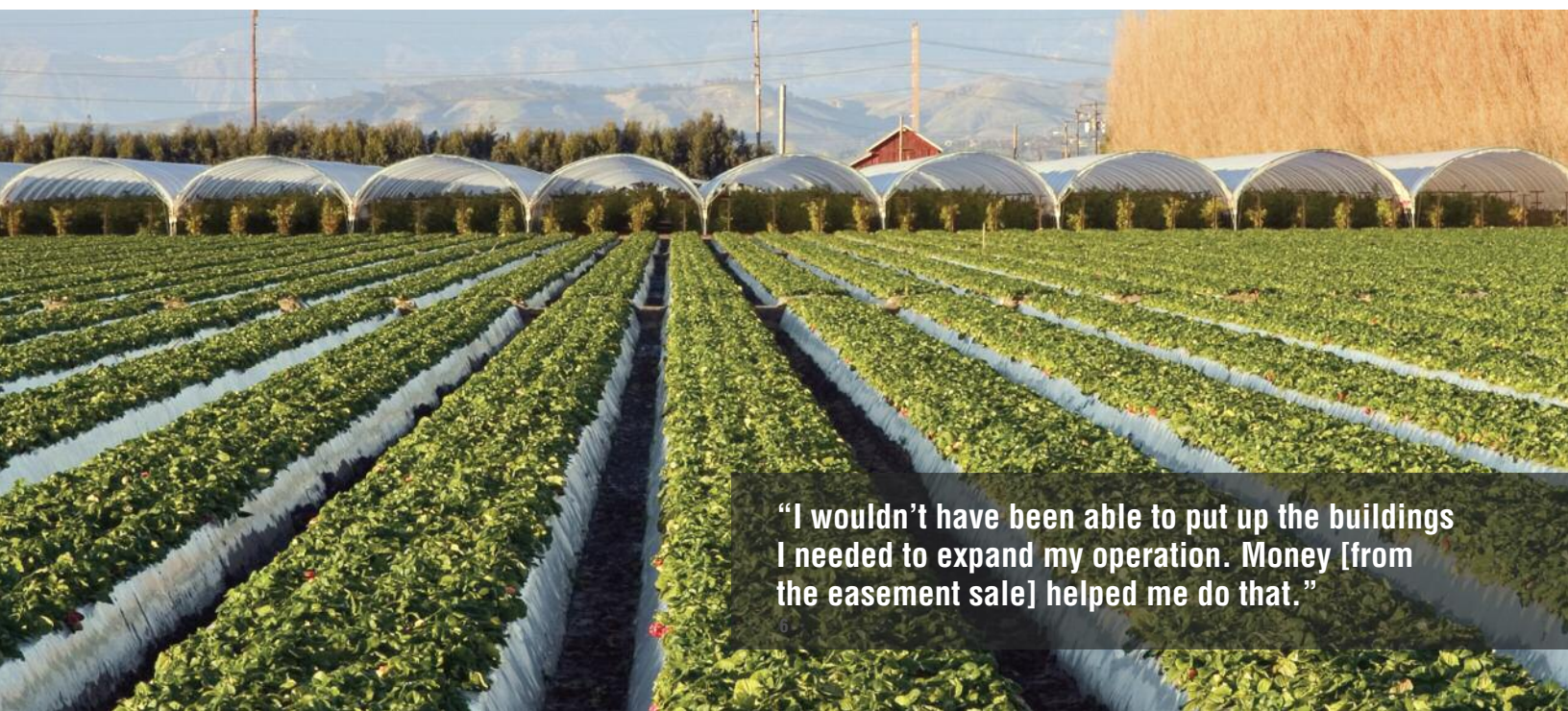
Participants reported making changes to strengthen their operations since they first owned protected land. The study compared several indicators in the first year the operator farmed protected land to the most recent full production year (2011). Among the 247 respondents who fell into this subgroup:

- 21 percent had increased their total acres while just 9 percent had decreased their acreage; among those who added acres, more than half nearly doubled the size of their farms;
- 19 percent increased the number of different outlets used to sell their products, and only 7 percent dropped one or more;
- 11 operators started marketing products directly to groups of consumers, while only one operator dropped this form of marketing;
- 36 started using a new management system (such as nutrient management, pest management, precision farming, organic farming or grazing systems) since the land had been protected, while only three producers discontinued a specific management system;
- 3 percent of operators expanded the number of cost-saving energy facilities, including solar panels, wind turbines, geothermal heat pumps or manure digester systems, and none stopped using them since protecting their land.

It's likely that proceeds from easement sales helped pay for these changes. Nearly all (95 percent) of the subgroup of 247 operators had sold easements, and 64 percent of those who did said that they spent the largest share of their proceeds on farm-related purposes.

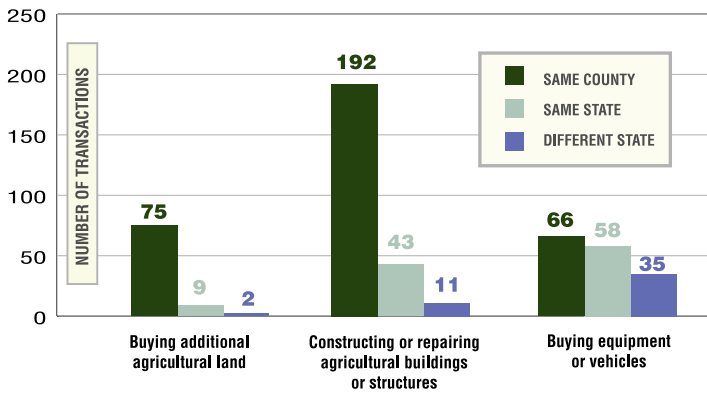
How Respondents Spent Easement Proceeds

	Number of Respondents	Percentage Reporting
Meeting personal or household needs or purposes	330	69%
Constructing, expanding or repairing agricultural-use buildings or other structures on their land	231	48%
Repaying loans on agricultural land they already owned	179	37%
Buying equipment or vehicles for farming or ranching or for processing or marketing their agricultural products	134	28%
Installing or expanding conservation practices	97	20%
Buying additional agricultural land	84	18%
Starting up or expanding the use of a management system	49	10%
Other expenditures on agricultural operations	24	5%
Landowners who reported spending at least some of the proceeds for agricultural purposes	403	84%



"I wouldn't have been able to put up the buildings I needed to expand my operation. Money [from the easement sale] helped me do that."

Where Easement Proceeds Were Spent



The FRPP also strengthens the agricultural sector in communities with participating farms. Easement proceeds spent on agricultural purposes tend to be spent locally (i.e., in the same county as the protected land). Money was invested in agricultural land—reducing or eliminating debt to build equity or acquiring new land—and spent at agriculturally related businesses.

- 96 percent of landowners who paid down loans on agricultural land said it was the protected farm or other agricultural land located in the same county;
- 89 percent of respondents who used proceeds to buy additional agricultural land purchased it in the same county;
- 83 percent who reported expenditures on building, expanding or repairing agricultural structures said the work was undertaken by individuals or contractors from the same county; and
- 49 percent of landowners who bought equipment or vehicles purchased them in the same county.

Lastly, the program helps partners assemble blocks of protected land. The research found that protected farms and ranches tend to be near additional agricultural land or open space. Sixty-two percent of all respondents said that three-quarters or more of the land within a mile of their protected land was either in agricultural use or was “other protected land, like a park.” Even in the densely populated Northeast, 52 percent of respondents reported that 75 percent or more of the land near their protected property was being farmed or was open. Creating core agricultural areas supports a range of agricultural activities, sustains vital ancillary businesses, helps head off land use conflicts and holds down operating costs.

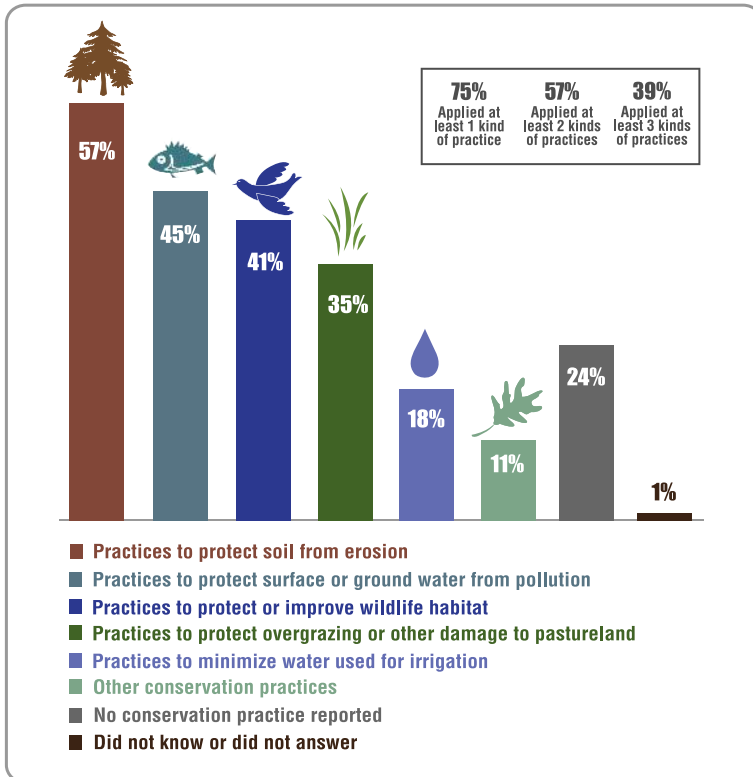
III. FRPP ENCOURAGES ON-FARM CONSERVATION

More than two-thirds of the 506 landowners reported having a *written* conservation plan at the time of the survey. Ninety-two percent of this group reported at least some progress in implementing the plan, and 50 percent said it was “completely applied.” In addition, 75 percent of landowners reported the application of at least one conservation practice and many participants applied multiple practices.¹⁰ More than two-thirds of the owner-operators in the FRPP sample reported implementing practices to prevent soil erosion or to protect water quality. In comparison, only 23 percent of operators responding to the 2007 Census of Agriculture said they used conservation methods to achieve comparable outcomes. On average, owner-operators among the FRPP sample applied more practices than non-operators (2.3 versus 1.5 out of six kinds discussed).

The research suggests a few reasons for the high proportions of conservation plans, rates of plan implementation and adoption of conservation practices. First, FRPP rules require plans for highly erodible land and certain forested parcels. Landowners



Conservation Practices Applied to FRPP-Protected Agricultural Land in 2011



were not asked if these rules applied to their protected land in order to obtain more frank responses about degree of plan implementation. However, among the respondents who said they were “encouraged” to begin new conservation practices since the execution of the easement, 11 verified that the new practices were required to manage highly erodible soils or forest land.

Second, among the 122 landowners who initiated new practices since the execution of the easement, 48 percent reported that they had received “encouragement” from the farmland protection program (i.e., the public or private entity that executed the easement). In addition to FRPP rules, forms of “encouragement” included education about the need for on-farm conservation, technical assistance in the development of a conservation plan or application of specific practices, and information about funding sources to implement recommended practices.

Lastly, funds from easement sales help landowners apply practices. Among the landowners who sold easements, 20 percent used proceeds to help install or expand conservation practices.

IV. FRPP HELPS FARMERS GAIN ACCESS TO LAND

The study highlights a few ways the FRPP helps farmers obtain land. First, the program helps finance land acquisition. As mentioned earlier, 55 percent of landowners who sold easements spent proceeds on repaying loans on agricultural land they already owned or buying additional land.

Furthermore, the FRPP helps make land more affordable at the outset. Among the 43 owners who *purchased* protected land, 65 percent reported that the price was lower than comparable

unprotected land; 39 percent said the price was “much lower” and 26 percent answered “somewhat lower.” Seventeen of the 43 had rented the protected land before purchasing it. When the purchasers were asked *why* they bought protected land, 30 percent said they bought the land because it was affordable. Purchasers also reported that the easement helped them secure financing. Among the 37 percent who thought the easement helped them get a loan, six said it did so by reducing the price of the land.

The research found that among respondents with succession plans, most planned to transfer their land to farmers. Among the 61 percent of respondents with written or oral agreements, 69 percent reported that the next owner would either “definitely” or “probably” be a farmer who will use the protected land for agricultural production. Fifty-eight percent of owner-operators had either a written or oral agreement; among this group, the percentage saying the next owner would likely be a farmer who would use the land for agriculture climbed to 75 percent. Notably, 92 percent of the identified next generation operators among all landowners were reported to be children or other relatives.

FRPP may also help facilitate transfers. Of the 79 landowners who said the easement had an effect on succession, four in 10 offered positive comments. For example, eight owners said the easement reduces the market value of the land, which makes it easier to sell to farmers, nine noted that the easement helps reduce taxes on the land for the next generation and six said the easement proceeds made it easier to pass on the farm intact because they were able to improve the operation and/or create a retirement account. Five percent of respondents who sold easements explicitly reported that one of their goals for participating in the program was to facilitate transfer of ownership to the next generation.





“...it lowered the purchase price dramatically. It makes it possible to purchase land and use it for agriculture.”

How Does FRPP Help Young and Beginning Farmers?

The FRPP helps young and beginning farmers gain access to land.¹¹ Twelve young and/or beginning farmers purchased protected land, and 19 landowners reported that they rent their protected land to young and/or beginning farmers. Fifty-six young and/or beginning farmers sold easements. Proceeds may have been used to pay down debt on farmland, acquire additional land or make improvements to their operations. Furthermore, 111 owners with identified farmer successors reported that the next owner would be a young or beginning farmer. All told, 35 percent of the surveyed owners reported one or more ways in which the farmland protection program had either helped them gain ground when they were “young” or “beginning farmers” or would benefit these types of farmers in the future.

LANDOWNER SATISFACTION

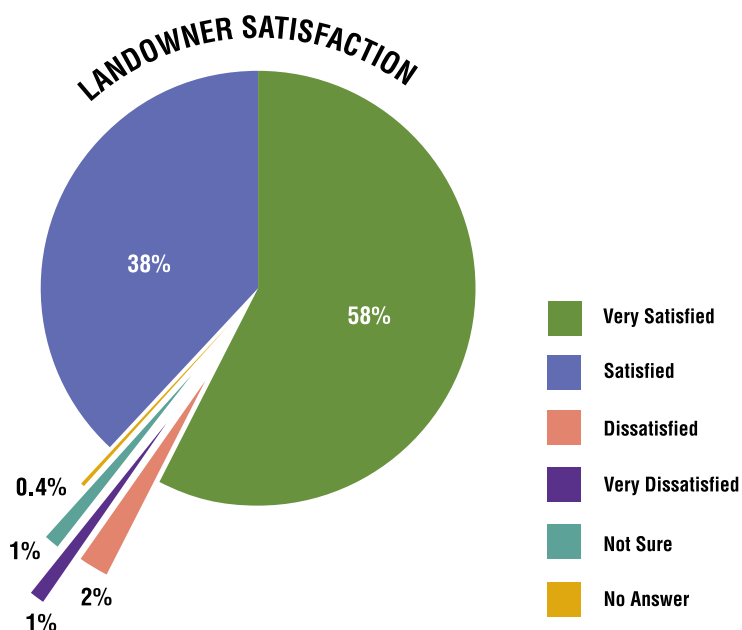
Virtually all landowners, 96 percent, expressed satisfaction with being an owner of protected land; almost six out of 10 landowners were “very satisfied.” Only 14 individuals were dissatisfied. Landowners were asked to supply reasons for their overall assessment. Eighty-five percent of landowners provided positive explanations, and 20 percent offered critical remarks. Fifty individuals supplied both positive and negative reasons.

The top positive explanation for their overall assessment was that the program enabled them to protect agricultural land from development. It was provided by 45 percent of all owners. The chief complaint—registered by 8 percent of participants—was the long, complicated process to sell an easement. Just 4 percent objected to easement restrictions such as limits on impervious surfaces and stream buffers.

The research also examined landowner motivations for participating in the program. More than two-thirds of landowners who sold easements said they did so to save their land for agriculture. Nineteen percent indicated that they wanted to protect the family legacy (i.e., “save a farm that had been in the family for generations”). Sixteen percent were motivated by the opportunity to free up capital that could be invested in their operation. As noted above, 5 percent told interviewers that a goal was to facilitate transfer of ownership to the next generation.

Nearly three-quarters said they had achieved their goals “to a great extent”; 22 percent said “to a moderate extent.” Just 3 percent said the easement sale only enabled them to achieve their goals to a “slight” extent, and only 1 percent reported that the easement did not help them achieve their goals “at all.”

Close to half (47 percent) said that they would have been “worse off” if they had not sold an easement on their property. They gave a range of reasons including being forced to sell or develop the land (14 percent), finding it financially more challenging to continue the operation (10 percent) or having to work more years before retiring or passing the land to heirs (3 percent).



DISCUSSION

Productive farm and ranch land is an essential resource. Food production, and therefore long-term food security, depends on the availability of agricultural land. Working lands support local economies through sales of farm goods, job creation, support services and businesses, and underpin secondary markets such as food processing and distribution. Farmland also generates more in revenues than it costs in community services, paying its own way while helping to balance local budgets. Well-managed farm and ranch land provides food and habitat for wildlife, helps control flooding, absorbs and filters stormwater and aids groundwater recharge. Farm and ranch land adds to community character and quality of life.

The research shows that the FRPP saves threatened agricultural land. More than a third of respondents who sold easements said that without the program their land *already would have been developed*. And land protected by FRPP is supporting serious commercial enterprises: half of the protected farms are 140 acres or more, 75 percent larger than the national median, and relatively more operators of FRPP-protected farms fall into the top sales categories.


At the same time, FRPP-protected farmland delivers public benefits. Protected farms are growing food and other agricultural products for local consumers. Proceeds from easement sales are contributing to local economies, and additional conservation measures are being adopted to head off soil erosion, protect water quality and improve wildlife habitat.

Beyond these achievements, the research reveals additional program impacts that help ensure a future for farming. The sale of agricultural conservation easements gives landowners the

security, motivation and means to make changes that improve the long-term profitability of their operations. Landowners' expenditures help support critical agricultural-related businesses, bolstering the viability of the entire sector. This study also suggests multiple ways the FRPP helps farmers obtain land for agriculture. Keeping farmers on the land is one of the most important farmland protection strategies, increasing the likelihood that the protected land, and even nearby unprotected agricultural land, will stay in agriculture.

Findings also show that the FRPP encourages on-farm conservation. Development is the most visible, but not the only, threat to productive farm and ranch land. Close to 1.75 billion tons of soil were lost in 2007.¹² And, 5.4 million acres in the contiguous 48 states have saline soils—heavy accumulations of salts that force farmers to abandon production.¹³ FRPP requirements prompt better resource management, and funds from easement sales, coupled with information and assistance provided by PACE program and land trust staff, make more conservation possible. The FRPP addresses resource degradation to support long-term viability; tying conservation measures to permanent protection ensures that gains will not be undone by development.

The FRPP delivers unparalleled value. Every federal dollar allocated to this program is matched by an estimated two dollars¹⁴ in landowner donations, private funds and dollars from state, local and tribal governments. The collective investment by FRPP partners makes a compelling case for future federal funding to protect working lands. The findings from this study strengthen the argument. The FRPP saves a critical resource from development, provides public benefits and addresses the underlying threats to our farm and ranch land. It is a comprehensive approach to a complex and urgent issue.



“It was a farm in the family for over 100 years, and we wanted to keep it that way.”

NOTES

- ¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2009. *Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory*, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, DC, and Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology, Iowa State University, Ames, IA. 123 pages. Available at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/2007/2007_NRI_Summary.pdf.
- ² Thirty-eight percent (8,716,600 acres) of the agricultural land converted to developed land nationwide was prime, although prime land accounted for less than 30 percent of agricultural land in 1982. From 1982–2007, 44 percent more prime agricultural land was converted, proportionally, than non-prime agricultural land during the same time period.
- ³ Compiled by AFT's Farmland Information Center. Market value of agricultural products by county supplied by USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service from the 2007 Census of Agriculture. Urban influenced counties are those assigned a 2003 urban influence code of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 by the USDA Economic Research Service.
- ⁴ American Farmland Trust, *Status of State PACE Programs* and *Status of Local PACE Programs*, Northampton, MA: American Farmland Trust, 2012.
- ⁵ American Farmland Trust, *A Nationwide Survey of Land Trusts that Protect Farm and Ranch Land*, Northampton, MA: American Farmland Trust, 2013.
- ⁶ Data supplied by NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division – Strategic Information Team, May 2013 and available at: http://soils.usda.gov/survey/rca/viewer/reports/tb08_cp_frpp.html.
- ⁷ The purpose of the program is to protect "...the agricultural use and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses..." (16 U.S.C. §3838i).
- ⁸ The U.S. Department of Agriculture has identified 10 Farm Production Regions. The Northeast region includes Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and the District of Columbia. Appalachia encompasses Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. The Southeast includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. Delta states are Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Lake States include Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The Corn Belt represents Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Ohio. Northern Plains equals Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. Southern Plains states account for Oklahoma and Texas. Mountain States encompass Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming. Pacific States are Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington.
- ⁹ Forest land cannot make up more than two-thirds of the acreage submitted in the pending offer.
- ¹⁰ Conservation practices are land management techniques that reduce pollution, conserve resources and enhance wildlife habitat, prevent overgrazing or other damage to pasture land, reduce water used for irrigation, or achieve other benefits. Adoption of these practices delivers public benefits like reduced soil erosion and cleaner water and air.
- ¹¹ Beginning farmers, by USDA definition, are individuals with 10 years or less experience operating farms. In the context of this study, young farmers are 35 years or younger.
- ¹² U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2009. *Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory*, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, DC, and Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology, Iowa State University, Ames, IA. 123 pages. Available at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/2007/2007_NRI_Summary.pdf.
- ¹³ U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2011. RCA Appraisal, available at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1044939.pdf.
- ¹⁴ Data supplied by NRCS FRPP Program Manager in April 2006.

Acknowledgements

This project was made possible through a contribution agreement with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and support from the members of American Farmland Trust. AFT appreciates thoughtful review by NRCS easement division staff. Thank you to the 506 agricultural land-owners who agreed to be interviewed and who permanently protected their land to keep it available for farming.

American Farmland Trust is the nation's leading conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices and keeping farmers on the land. For more information, visit www.farmland.org or call (202) 331-7300.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency within the United States Department of Agriculture that works with landowners through conservation planning and assistance to benefit the soil, water, air, plants and animals for productive lands and healthy ecosystems.

The Farmland Information Center is a clearinghouse for information about farmland protection and stewardship. It is a project of AFT maintained on behalf of the USDA NRCS. Visit www.farmlandinfo.org or call (800) 370-4879.