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NEWS RELEASE

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Federal Conservation Assistance Available to New Hampshire Farmers and Forest Landowners

Article announces program sign-up and upcoming ranking cut-off dates, explains programs, offers next steps for interested reader

DURHAM, NH (December 11, 2009) – Agriculture or forest landowners in New Hampshire interested in protecting, conserving, or restoring the natural resources on their property through technical or financial assistance, or a conservation easement, should contact their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to begin the conservation planning process. Applications for Farm Bill programs may be submitted at any time year-round; however, there are certain cut-off ranking dates. If you miss a ranking cut-off date, your application will be retained and reviewed for the next cut-off date.

“NRCS conservation programs help farmers and forest landowners promote environmental quality on farm and forest land, address water quality and quantity challenges, and protect valuable wetland ecosystems, agricultural lands, and wildlife habitat,” said Rick Ellsmore, NRCS Acting State Conservationist for New Hampshire. “NRCS conservation professionals will discuss with you your conservation objectives, help you identify resource concerns, and suggest options and alternatives for treatment. We will also identify conservation programs that may provide you with financial assistance for the implementation of certain conservation practices.”

Examples of eligible lands in New Hampshire include privately owned:

- Agricultural land
- Grasslands
- Non-industrial forest lands
- Freshwater wetlands and salt marshes
- Coastal habitats, and rivers and streams

Emphasis areas in New Hampshire are:

- Livestock and grazing issues
- Cropland – including orchards, specialty crops and greenhouse operations
- Forestry
- [Organic Agriculture](#) [List of organic practices*](#)
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat – including native pollinator habitat
- [Air Quality](#) [List of air quality practices*](#)
- Energy

The 2008 Farm Bill provides additional payments for land owners who qualify as beginning farmers, limited resource producers, or who are “socially disadvantaged” because they belong to racial or ethnic groups that have historically been subjected to prejudice. Such landowners can receive up to 90 percent of the costs associated with planning and implementing conservation measures and up to 30 percent of expected costs may be provided in advance.

Stewardship Programs – Next ranking cut-off date is January 14, 2010:

[Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP) – provides financial and technical assistance to eligible producers to conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. Eligible lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest lands, agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe, and other private agricultural land (including cropped woodland, marshes, and agricultural land used for the production of livestock) on which resource concerns related to agricultural production could be addressed.

CSP encourages land stewards to improve their conservation performance by installing and adopting additional activities, and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities on agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land.

CSP offers participants two possible types of payments:

1. Annual payment for installing and adopting additional activities, and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities
2. Supplemental payment for the adoption of resource-conserving crop rotations.

Financial Assistance Programs – Next ranking cut-off date is January 22, 2010:

- [Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program](#) (WHIP) – This program provides assistance to landowners who want to improve fish and wildlife habitat or restore natural ecosystems on their land. NRCS provides compensation for part of the cost of establishing and maintaining conservation practices that are necessary for enhancing and improving wildlife habitat and restoring natural ecosystems. [A list of practices*](#) is available on the NRCS NH website.
- [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP) – Through EQIP, farmers may receive financial and technical help with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural and forest land. EQIP in New Hampshire offers financial assistance to help off-set the costs of eligible conservation practices. Payments may also be made to encourage a farmer to adopt land management practices, such as nutrient management, manure management, integrated pest management, or wildlife habitat management. Lists of practices* are available on the NRCS NH website for [general](#), [organic](#), and [air quality](#).
- [Agricultural Management Assistance](#) (AMA) – This financial assistance program helps farmers adopt conservation practices and investment strategies that will reduce or mitigate risks to their agricultural enterprises. [A list of practices*](#) is available on the NRCS NH website.

Easement Programs – Next ranking cut-off date is February 1, 2010:

- [Wetlands Reserve Program](#) (WRP) – This easement program provides funding to purchase conservation easements and complete wetland restorations; offering the opportunity for landowners to voluntarily protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. To be eligible, the landowner must have owned the land for at least seven years prior to enrolling the land in the program, with some exceptions. Additionally, the land must demonstrate resource concerns (such as degraded wetland functions and values) that are restorable and will enhance wildlife benefits.

The program offers landowners two options: permanent easements and restoration cost-share agreements of a minimum 10-year duration. For permanent easements, the USDA pays 100 percent of the easement and the costs of restoring the wetland. For a 10 year restoration cost-share agreement to re-establish degraded or lost wetland habitat, the USDA pays 75 percent of the cost of the restoration activity. This 10-year agreement does not place an easement on the property. The landowner provides the restoration site without reimbursement.

- [Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program](#) (FRPP) – The Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) provides matching funds to purchase conservation easements to keep

productive farm and ranch land in agricultural uses. USDA provides funds to State, Tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations (eligible entities) to acquire conservation easements from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement. The eligible entities must provide at least half of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement.

To qualify, the land must have fifty percent prime, unique, or important farmland soils; have a historic or archeological resource; or have land that supports the policy of a State or local farm and ranch land protection program. The land must also: be part of a pending offer from a State, tribe, or local farmland protection program; be privately owned; have a conservation plan; be large enough to sustain agricultural production; be accessible to markets for what the land produces; have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services; and have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term sustainable agricultural production.

NRCS has [offices](#) in Concord, Conway, Epping, Lancaster, Milford, Walpole, and Woodsville, which work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the state.

Contact your local office for more information. General program information is available on the NRCS New Hampshire website at www.nh.nrcs.usda.gov.

*Practice lists are for fiscal year 2009 and will be updated shortly for fiscal year 2010 on the NH NRCS website with some changes.

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