

Indiana Working Farmland Protection Fact Sheet

Background:

The Indiana General Assembly currently is considering legislation (i.e. HB 1654) supporting agricultural economic development and farmland protection actions for Indiana that could be compatible with the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program. Indiana Agriculture, an important part of our heritage, accounts for one in 15 Hoosier workers and is very important to the economy of the state. Furthermore the Hoosier State is blessed with some of the best land in the world for producing certain agricultural products. Therefore it is important that Indiana focus on what it can do to protect working farmland in the state

Federal Program Information:

The Federal government's USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) provides up to 50% of the cost to purchase conservation easements on qualifying farmland to keep such land in agricultural use. The Federal program is a voluntary program that supports the existing farmland protection programs of eligible sponsoring organizations. Once the land is protected under an easement all agricultural uses can continue, but the land can not be used or developed for non agricultural uses.

The USDA NRCS National Resource Inventory (NRI) data shows that over the last five years, we have lost an average of 3.5 square miles per month of Indiana prime farmland from rural areas. NRI data shows that Indiana is 4th highest in the nation in the percent of 1997 developed land that was prime farmland in 1992 and 7th in the U.S. in the average annual loss of prime farmland to development from 1992-1997.

The Federal program requires the sponsoring organization, at minimum, provide 50% of the value of the easements upfront. However, landowner donations of up to 25% of the easement value can be counted as part of the sponsors 50%. Local qualifying sponsors can include various local and state government units, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Resource Conservation & Development Councils, land trusts organizations, and others. Local sponsor funds have been a main obstacle for Indiana's participation in the program. Due to lack of local sponsor funding, Indiana has lost several very promising projects. In the last two years, Indiana had access to over \$2 million dollars of federal funds earmarked for the state that had to be returned to Washington, DC and were utilized by other states.

Additional information about "Working Farmland Protection" in Indiana is available at:

www.hoosierchapterswcs.org . House Bill 1654 information is available at: <http://www.in.gov/legislative> after clicking on the Bills and Resolutions Section and then by typing 1654 in the appropriate box.

Information about the USDA-NRCS Farm & Ranch Land Protection Program is available on the Indiana USDA NRCS web site at: <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/FRPP/FRPPhomepage.html>.

Information on the National USDA-NRCS web site is available at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp/>.

"Indiana Working Farmland Protection" Suggestions:

- Please join us in supporting HB 1654 that authorizes the Indiana Land Resources Council to promote farmland protection and serve as a statewide coordinator for farmland protection efforts.
- Support Funding the Council with \$5 million for the next biennium to be used as matching funds for the Federal Program. The Bill authorizes the Council to cooperate communicate and assist in seeking and holding donations and funds from interested individuals, groups, and organizations to support a state farmland protection effort compatible with the Federal program. State matching dollars: can generate a match of 1:1 or up to 3:1 for the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP). The Bill also allows counties desiring to use local taxes to support a county farmland protection program to do so. Efforts should be made to work towards saving larger blocks of farmland that interested landowners in a farming community voluntarily agree to protect and have worked with county or community land use planning efforts that support farmland protection. Under this program local sponsors, not the state, will have all the responsibilities for the management and maintenance of the conservation easements.

Contact: Ron Lauster, Hoosier Chapter Soil & Water Conservation Society- Phone 317-569-0063 or flsc@indy.rr.com