



July 27, 2009

574

Easement Programs Division
Room 6819-S
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013-2890

RE: Farm and Ranch Lands Program Comments

Dear Sirs/Madams:

The Leelanau Conservancy is a 501(c) not-for-profit established in 1988 with nearly 2,800 members. In the last 21 years, we have preserved over 7,200 acres and 27 miles of shoreline/stream and river frontage, including over 2,000 acres of productive farmland, most of which utilized FRPP and match funds. In 2008, the Leelanau Conservancy also became one of the first fully accredited land trusts in the nation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

The Leelanau Conservancy supports the comments submitted by American Farmland Trust, the of the Land Trust Alliance and Heart of the Lakes Center for Conservation Policy concerning the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) Interim Final Rule (Docket Number NRCS-IFR-08013) as published on January 16, 2009.

Specifically the Leelanau Conservancy supports the revision of the "contingent right of enforcement" for agricultural conservation easements as consistent with Congressional intent. We endorse the comments by the above-named organizations with respect to:

- Requirements regarding easement terms and conditions should reflect new interpretation of "contingent right of enforcement"
- Certification should be used to provide a meaningful way to reduce administrative burdens for experienced entities
- Forest management plan requirement should be eliminated or significantly revised to allow entities in the field to best protect forest resources
- Land trusts and farmers should be provided the flexibility to design and implement their own impervious surface standards, rather than a "one-size-fits-all" rule.
- New national ranking criteria do not adequately recognize state and local farmland protection goals; land trusts and other partnering entities that become certified should be allowed to use their own criteria for ranking farmland protection projects.

We request that our support of these comments be considered and adopted as NRCS revises the amended rule and implements the program. Thank you. We welcome your questions and comments.

Sincerely,



Thomas Nelson
Director of Farm Programs