



House Committee on Agriculture

Bob Goodlatte
Chairman

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Statement of Chairman Bob Goodlatte Committee on Agriculture

Business Meeting to consider H.R. 5313, Open Space and Farmland Preservation Challenge Grant Act September 21, 2006

The Farmland Protection Program is a mandatory program administered by Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides funds to state, tribal, and local governments, and non governmental organizations to help them purchase conservation easements from willing sellers to limit conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. As many of us are aware, urban and suburban sprawl is one of the biggest problems that face our farm communities today.

The bill before us today, HR 5313, the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Challenge Grant Act, amends the Farm Security Act of 1985 to set aside 15 percent of Farmland Protection funds for cost-share grants (25 percent maximum Federal share) to support eligible State agencies, county, and one or more eligible entities (local government or private entities) to purchase conservation easements.

This bill allows federal dollars to go further by lowering the federal match fund to a maximum of 25 percent and allowing other entities to make up the other 75 percent. States where the state, county and local grassroots effort is strong can make better use of increasingly limited dollars. For example, Pennsylvania which has great grassroots efforts in protecting farmland had the highest number of unfunded Easement Applications, 65 for FY 05, which account for 6,200 acres not being able to be put into this program. By being to able to use these reserved funds, more acres with help from all groups, can be protected.

There is no new spending authorized in this bill; it simply creates a set-aside out of existing federal farmland protection program dollars. Any funds not used will go back into the general disbursement of Farmland Protection Funds.

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