

## NEWS RELEASE



6013 Lakeside Boulevard  
Indianapolis, IN 46278  
[www.in.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov)

### **Natural Resources Conservation Service Provides Funding to Idle Flooded Fields**

INDIANAPOLIS, September 8, 2008—Farm fields throughout Indiana lost tons of topsoil in the June floods, and some fields gained tons of sand, deposited by rivers that broke through protective levees. These fields have gone from productive to paralyzed, and the only government assistance available may be to put the land into a permanent easement program.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service manages the Floodplain Easement Program, available only in emergency situations following natural disasters. NRCS has announced an open sign-up period from now until October 1, and a continuous sign-up for some time after that. The program hasn't been offered in Indiana in the last six years but is now available to affected farmers. "For producers with land that is now not farmable, this may be the best option," said NRCS State Conservationist Jane Hardisty. "The magnitude of soil loss has made it impossible to replace or restore the soil resource in some areas. The Floodplain Easement Program offers farmers revenue for this lost land, while providing additional protection for future flood events." To be eligible the land must have flooded at least twice in the last 10 years, and once in the last 12 months.

Placing flooded fields in easement programs also provides benefits for surrounding producers and communities. The idled lands create a new place for excess water during flood events, safeguarding lives and property from future floods. "The Floodplain Easement Program is completely voluntary, and willing landowners are compensated based on the value of the land," said Hardisty. She explained that while the landowner retains ownership, some restrictions are put on the land. The easement is permanent, remaining on the land if it is sold. Recreational uses, such as hunting, hiking and birding, are permitted, and the landowner controls access to the land. Each county has a designated easement payment rate that is roughly based on land values in the county.

In addition to the Floodplain Easement Program, other non-disaster easement programs are also available. The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) offers both 30-year and permanent easements, and can help cover restoration costs. To be eligible for WRP, the land must be cropland or pastureland, and at least half the land must have been considered a wetland prior to being farmed. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) offers annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, conservation covers on farmland. To be eligible for CRP, the landowner must have

owned or operated the land for the past 12 months, and the land must meet cropland requirements.

To find out more details about the Floodplain Easement Program or to apply for the program, contact NRCS at your nearest USDA Service Center. Locations can be found at [http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory/field\\_offices.html](http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/directory/field_offices.html).

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Contact:

Jane Hardisty, NRCS State Conservationist, (317) 290-3200

Michael McGovern, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, (317) 290-3200, ext. 324