

Farm Bureau Publishes Guide To Conservation Easements

PARK RIDGE, Ill., December 8, 2000 -- The American Farm Bureau Federation has teamed up with two respected land management specialists to produce an authoritative guide for landowners considering the sale of conservation easements on their land.

"The Landowner's Guide To Conservation Easements," authored by Dr. Steven Bick and Dr. Harry L. Haney, covers all the issues related to the sale of conservation easements so landowners can be fully informed before making a final decision.

According to AFBF President Bob Stallman, a Texas cattle and rice producer, the book is "a must read" for landowners considering conservation easements as part of their land management plan.

"This book is unique from all other material published on the topic of conservation easements because it takes an objective look at this complicated issue from the perspective of a landowner," Stallman said. "Other material about conservation easements usually contains a bias -- either espousing or deriding the virtues of this relatively new land management tool. This guide draws on research conducted with landowners regarding their actual experiences in granting conservation easements."

An easement is a less-than-full ownership interest in a parcel of land. It is generally a voluntary but binding legal contract that directs land management. Landowners who grant easements give up some of their ownership rights, according to Don Parrish, senior environmental policy specialist for AFBF

"Many landowners are considering or have willingly sold or donated conservation easements for a wide range of benefits and incentives," Parrish explained. "The agreements behind conservation easements are formally recorded in a deed, which can prohibit some activities entirely, modify existing uses, and/or introduce new ones. Understanding that easements divide ownership interest in property is the first step in determining if a conservation easement is right for you and your land."

According to Parrish, the use of conservation easements is becoming more common across the nation, as landowners "discover their land holds intrinsic values that American society has only lately grown to treasure." Whether landowners accept payment for the preservation of open space, or a number of other conservation functions, there are a number of points that must be considered before any agreement is signed.

One of the authors, Bick, is the principal consultant with Northeast Forests, LLC, of Thendara, N.Y. He serves as adjunct assistant professor of forestry at the State University of New York's College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, N.Y. The other author, Haney, serves as a Professor of Forestry and is an Extension Specialist in Forest Management-Economics at Virginia Tech University.

Topics covered in the book include:

- An in-depth explanation of conservation easements and whether they are appropriate for an owner's land.
- Income, estate and property tax aspects.
- Designing easement deeds and reserving rights.
- Results of easement arrangements.
- A process for informed decision-making.

For more information about the topic of conservation easements, contact AFBF's Parrish at (847) 685-8742. Credit card orders for the book (\$24.95) may be placed by calling Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company at 1-800-228-0810.