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## ***News Release***

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### **Grassland Protection Opportunity Extended**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM – New Mexico has a chance to be just a little bit “greener” as the final date for acceptance of applications for 2009 funding under the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) has been extended to June 5, 2009. The Grassland Reserve Program is administered by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and provides conservation opportunities for protection of New Mexico grasslands from development through permanent easements or term-specific rental contracts.

“The State Technical Committee that advises NRCS is encouraging GRP applicants in Union, Harding, Quay, Curry, Roosevelt, Lea, DeBaca, Chaves, and Eddy counties this year,” said Norman Vigil, assistant state conservationist for programs.

The condition of the range is a heavily weighted ranking factor in this very competitive program, with priority given to grasslands that are in the best condition. Other ranking factors include the diversity of ecological sites within the area considered, threat of conversion to non-grassland uses, and viability of easement management.

The Grassland Reserve Program has historically enabled some of New Mexico’s finest land stewards to ensure their private rangeland is preserved as rangeland, and not converted to other uses such as urban development, cropland, or for industrial purposes. It provides payments for agreements that restrict development either on a permanent basis or term-specific arrangement.

“In addition to enabling ranchers to preserve their legacy, the Grassland Reserve Program benefits New Mexico as whole by protecting our watersheds, sequestering carbon, and enhancing wildlife habitat,” said Vigil.

The agency advises that while a cut-off date for 2009 funding is necessary, applications for the program are accepted on a continuous basis for future opportunities.

For more information about the program and how to apply, contact your local NRCS field office.

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