

# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **NEW MEXICO LAND CONSERVANCY**

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## **FEDERAL FARM AND RANCLAND PROTECTION PROGRAM AWARDS \$291,000 FOR FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN NEW MEXICO**

### **The New Mexico Land Conservancy and the Village of Corrales Recipients of USDA Grant**

**July 6, 2006**

Today, the New Mexico Land Conservancy, a statewide land trust based in Santa Fe, announced that in conjunction with its partner, the Village of Corrales, it has received a grant for \$291,000 through the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) in support of ongoing farmland preservation efforts within the Village of Corrales.

“The Corrales Farmland Preservation Program has been a very successful conservation initiative,” said Executive Director, Scott Wilber, of the New Mexico Land Conservancy. “Through a combination of purchased and donated conservation easements, landowners and the community have ensured that productive farmland land and scenic open space will never be lost to development, and that an important part of the traditional agricultural heritage and quality of life of the Village will be maintained.”

“We hope the success of the Corrales program will serve as an example and model for other communities around the state that are interested in land conservation,” said Wilber. “Although funding for the purchase of development rights programs is difficult to come by, hopefully other communities will look at what Corrales has managed to achieve and consider developing their own programs.”

Wilber noted that it will be important for the state to support farmland preservation by creating permanent funding that can be used to attract and leverage other local, state, federal and private funds. He added that the New Mexico Land Conservancy is in fact part of an ongoing effort - involving conservation organizations, agricultural producers and sportsmen from around the state - to pass the Land, Wildlife and Clean Energy Act. If passed, this proposed piece of legislation could

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generate approximately \$10 million per year in conservation funding through an existing tax on oil and gas revenues.

This is the second grant through this particular program, administered by the USDA through the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, to be awarded to the Village of Corrales and the New Mexico Land Conservancy. Last year, the New Mexico Land Conservancy worked with the Village, through its Farmland Preservation Program, to complete the first four purchased conservation easements, totaling 28 acres, which were completed in September for a total cost of \$2.3 million. Half of the funding to complete these easements was provided by a previous FRPP grant and the other half was made available from a local, voter approved general obligation bond in support of the Corrales Farmland Preservation Program.

The Village of Corrales established its Corrales Farmland Preservation Program in 2000 to provide incentives for landowners to protect their land from development and preserve open space. The program is implemented by the Corrales Farmland Preservation Committee, which is comprised of seven volunteer citizens and assisted by the village Planning and Zoning Administrator.

According to Wayne Kirkby, the current Committee Chair, “The mission of the program is to preserve and protect the farmland, open space and viewsheds of the Village of Corrales. This includes pursuing the acquisition of conservation easements, supporting the economics of farms and agricultural businesses, and perpetuating the rural character of Corrales.”

“This is a great program, a win-win for everyone,” noted Sayre Gerhart, a member of the Corrales Village council. “Farmland preservation is important to the rural character of Corrales and has strong community support. In 2004, voters approved using village funds for the purchase of development rights program with the approval of over 80% of the voters.”

“The landowners were also extremely patient, cooperative and generous throughout the entire process,” said Wilber. “Several landowners sold their easements below fair market value and all made contributions toward our stewardship endowment, a fund specifically set aside to cover our long-term easement monitoring and enforcement costs.”

Wilber noted that much of the success of the Corrales program has been due to the high level of commitment of the members of the Corrales Farmland Preservation Committee and the collaborative effort between the New Mexico Land Conservancy, the Village of Corrales, the Trust for Public Land, and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The New Mexico Land Conservancy, a statewide land trust based in Santa Fe, mission is to preserve New Mexico’s land heritage by protecting significant wildlife habitat, productive agricultural lands and scenic open space throughout the state. New Mexico Land Conservancy currently holds conservation easements over approximately 48,000 acres of land throughout New Mexico. As the holder of these easements, New Mexico Land Conservancy is ultimately responsible for their monitoring and enforcement.

Conservation easements are voluntary, legal agreements that permanently restrict development of private lands to protect their conservation values while permitting compatible forms of land use

such as farming and livestock grazing. The purchase of conservation easements, also commonly referred to as the purchase of development rights, benefits landowners by providing them with direct cash payments for the development rights associated with their lands, while allowing them to retain and use the easement-encumbered land for agriculture and other uses deemed compatible with the conservation easement.

According to the American Farmland Trust, between 40,000 to 50,000 acres of undeveloped, rural lands are converted to developed uses in New Mexico each year, of which approximately 10% are prime agricultural lands. While farmland protection through the use of donated conservation easements and purchased development rights is a fairly new concept in New Mexico, over two million acres of farmland have been preserved nationwide over the past 25 years using these land protection techniques.

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