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**Contact:** Russ Shay  
Director of Public Policy  
Ph: 202-638-4725 x 305  
Email: rshay@lta.org

# **Legislative Victory for Land Conservation**

## ***Congress Passes Conservation Tax Incentive for Family Farms and Ranches***

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — The hotly debated Farm Bill, which Congress enacted yesterday with an override of the President's veto, renews a powerful tax incentive which has helped conserve a million or more acres of farms, ranches and natural areas across the US. The incentive had expired January 1st, but is now retroactive to the beginning of the year and will last through 2009.

A broad coalition representing sportsmen, outdoors enthusiasts, farmers, ranchers and national conservation groups, embraced the measure. Rand Wentworth, president of the Land Trust Alliance, said "This renewed tax incentive for donations of conservation easements is one of the best things Congress could do this year to help landowners choose the conservation option over sprawl. Especially for family farmers and ranchers of modest income, this is a great way to help them keep productive agricultural land from being lost."

Wentworth gave special credit to Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Dave Camp (R-MI), saying "They are all true conservation leaders who have worked tirelessly to save a conservation measure that has already had benefits in hundreds of communities across the country." In conserving land, Wentworth added, "We also are protecting clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, local food sources, historic landscapes and scenic beauty."

Senator Baucus, who originated the incentive provision, said "Simply put—this is an incentive that works: for conservation, for farmers, for ranchers, and for all landowners who want a fair deal for their tremendous generosity in donating conservation easements. Many ranchers and other landowners in Montana and across the US have told me they could not afford to conserve their land without this measure."

The incentive, which applies to a landowner's federal income tax, will:

- Raise the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allow farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increase the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.

Landowner donations to conservation organizations known as land trusts have resulted in millions of acres of working lands and natural areas being conserved for the future. According to the Alliance, many conservation groups reported an annual doubling of the number of conservation agreements completed in 2007, in response to the same incentive that had expired in January. Land trusts in America have together saved more than 36 million acres from development, an area the size of New England.

The Alliance also credited the success of the measure to the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector, which has taken the lead in conserving land in recent years. Said Wentworth, "The fact is that conservation in this country now depends greatly on the generosity of individuals. It is the individual rancher, farmer or forester, working the land in a way that is conservation-oriented, who will largely define our natural heritage in the future."