



Pacific Northwest States Office

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(Date)

(Merge printed name and address)

Re: Washington Stewardship Incentives Project

Dear _____:

We need your help to improve incentives for voluntary conservation stewardship on private lands.

Overview:

Nearly half of the total lands of the State of Washington are in private agriculture or forestry. So the environment of our state depends greatly upon those lands remaining in the hands of successful ranch, farm and forest businesses and upon their being managed with good conservation stewardship. Voluntary incentives are one of our society's most powerful tools for protecting the land and assuring its sound management. It is critical that the programs that provide these incentives be as strong as is humanly possible. Hopefully the more effective they are, the less often government agencies will need to regulate to protect the environment and the easier it will be for private natural resource landowners to keep their land in profitable farm and forest business. The Washington Stewardship Incentives Project is a partnership among several public and private agencies to find ways to strengthen the effectiveness of these programs.

Survey goals:

If conservation incentives programs are to be effective, however, they must be designed to be as appealing, as useful, and as workable as possible for the private landowners we hope will use them. That's where you come in. Would you be willing to complete the enclosed brief survey and send us your views on how to make voluntary incentives for conservation stewardship on private lands more strategic, more cost effective, more appealing, and more useful to the landowner community?

What do we mean by incentives?

When we refer to incentives, we'd like you to think broadly, about various forms of conservation incentive programs provided landowners to improve the environment. For example:

- Conservation stewardship cost-share programs that pay all or part of the cost of completing conservation improvements or management practices on private lands [e.g. the EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) through USDA-NRCS, or LIP (Landowner Incentives Program) through the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife].
- Conservation set-aside programs that pay landowners for setting aside natural resource business lands for conservation purposes [e.g. CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program), WRP (Wetlands Reserve Program), through NRCS, or other conservation easement programs through both private and public agencies].

Appendix G-3 – Sample survey letter

- Tax incentives programs that reward landowners for keeping land in agriculture or forestry or for managing it in a way that is friendly for the environment [e.g. current use taxation and public benefits rating system tax relief programs administered by local governments].
- Land protection programs that pay landowners to keep their lands in agriculture or forestry and out of development [e.g. FRPP (Federal Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program) and local PDR (purchase of development rights) programs administered by local or state governments or through various land trusts, or the Forest Legacy Program administered by the Washington Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service].
- Other. Other incentives that are made available to landowners in exchange for voluntary actions with respect to private lands that protect those lands from development or that improve their management for conservation stewardship. This may include market certifications, technical assistance, public recognition, or other ways that encourage private land stewardship.

Optional contact information:

If you wish to provide an e-mail and contact information with your survey response, we'll do our best to keep you informed about the progress of this project and promise not to make your opinions public. But if you prefer to remain anonymous, you need not identify yourself – we respect your wish to have your identity remain confidential. In either case, we're looking for your opinions and we promise to factor in your ideas as we develop proposals that may be presented to our State's policy community in the months ahead.

Thanks, sincerely, for your time and energy in helping us understand the perspectives of Washington's private landowners on these important public issues.

Yours truly,



Don Stuart
American Farmland Trust

Encl: Landowner survey form