

Agriculture Sustainability Act - House Bill 102

Purpose:

An Agriculture Sustainability Investment Fund to be developed in each county to preserve and sustain our ability to produce food in Utah.

Background:

Our dependency of foreign energy has increased dramatically over the past 50 years.

Data and trends are showing that unless we work toward producing more of our own locally grown food that we could experience that same type of dependency on foreign food and fiber without the safeguards of our regulatory controls and reasonable prices.

Current agricultural revenue in Utah exceeds \$1.5 billion dollars worth of crops and livestock sales.

Critical Trends:

- Between 2003-2008, Utah lost 500,000 acres of agricultural lands to development. (1980's – 10,000 ac/yr) (1990's – 20,000 ac/yr) (2000's – 60,000 ac/yr)
- Since 2000, Utah's population has grown at a rate of 22 percent while the nation grew at 8 percent.

For more information:
<http://ag.utah.gov>

Every minute of every day, we lose two acres of farm and ranch land to development.

This productive farm and ranch land is a finite resource as fertile soils take thousands of years to develop and are irreplaceable.



Agriculture Sustainability Act

H.B. 102

Protecting our food source



Losing our food-producing land

Productive agricultural land in Utah is disappearing at an alarming rate. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Utah lost 500,000 acres of farmland between 2003 and 2008. If these acres were planted with wheat, they could have produced several hundred million loaves of bread. If they were fruit orchards, they could have produced several billion apples.

Forward looking citizens and their leaders look to and anticipate the future of the agriculture industry in our state and the ability to produce pure, high quality food and fiber. With this in mind, we propose the Agriculture Sustainability Investment Fund to protect our most productive farm lands if and when the owners of those lands wish to guarantee that their property remain in agricultural production.

A bill sponsored by Representative Jack Draxler (R-North Logan) is being drafted as a cooperative effort with the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, The Utah Conservation Commission, the Utah Association of Conservation Districts, and several other agriculture related organizations. **Significant features of the legislation are:**

- **The program is completely voluntary.** Only property owners who wish to apply will be considered. Only productive agricultural land will be considered.
- **An elected local committee will evaluate** (county will approve) nominated properties based on a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment set of criteria.
- **Rollback taxes now paid in each county** when agricultural land is taken out of production and placed into development will accrue within each county. As that fund grows an appropriation plan will be developed to use those dollars to acquire conservation easements on those properties nominated by their owners and selected by the committee as crucial agricultural production land.
- **The result will be that these prime lands** will continue to produce, their owners will be able to receive the value of the development rights of the land for their retirement and/or inheritance, Utah's agriculture industry will continue to be sustained, and the public will continue to have locally produced, safe, high quality food, fruit, meats, dairy, and other products.

Benefits of Conservation Easements

Conservation easements permanently protect important farmland while keeping the land in private ownership and on local tax rolls.

Conservation easements are flexible, and can be tailored to meet the needs of individual farmers and ranchers and unique properties.

Conservation easements can provide farmers with several tax benefits including income, estate and property tax reductions.

By reducing nonfarm development land values, conservation easements help farmers and ranchers transfer their operations to the next generation.

