



H.B. 371: Changes and Updates Affecting Land Conservation in Utah

Background

In the 2022 General Legislative Session, the LeRay McAllister Critical Land Conservation Program was moved from the Quality Growth Commission of the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget to the Conservation Division of the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food. In the 2023 General Legislative Session, H.B. 371 changed the name of this program to the LeRay McAllister Working Farm and Ranch Fund. Another significant change is a requirement for counties to deposit 20% of their rollback tax funds into an account or fund which the county has set aside for preserving or restoring open land or agricultural land.

Farmland Assessment Act Rollback Tax Process

The county treasurer shall, deposit 20% of the rollback tax funds into an account or fund of the county set aside for preserving or restoring open land and agricultural land. The fund may be used to establish a conservation easement under Title 57, Chapter 18, Land Conservation Easement Act, or to fund similar methods to preserve open land or agricultural land.

What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a voluntary, legal agreement between a private landowner, nonprofit, or federal or state agency that limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. A conservation easement is one option to protect a property for future generations.

Benefits of Preserving Agricultural Land:



Provides fresh, local food for communities



Protects wildlife and plant habitats



Protects wetlands and watersheds



Supports agritourism



Ensures land will remain open and productive for future generations



Provides economic prosperity for rural areas

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Why Are Conservation Easements Important?

Since 1970, Utah has lost 2.9 million acres (21.3%) of our states farmland. Productive farmland is critical to the production of food and fiber, local food security, rural economies, and wildlife habitat. Farmers and ranchers are first and foremost stewards and conservationists of the land they depend on. Putting land into a conservation easement is a great option for protecting property for future generations.

How is The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food Involved in the Conservation Easement Process?

- Grants money for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements, and funding restoration projects on conserved land.
- Identifies open space and agricultural land eligible for preservation
- Hosts trainings on the process and procedures required to preserve open land and agricultural land.
- Identifies matching funding sources.
- Assists applicants with the grant application processes.
- Helps counties update general plans to include water and land planning and the preservation of open space and agricultural land.