

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Land donations are worth promoting

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According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this nation's farmland is disappearing at a rate of 3 acres per minute. If we continue to consume our best land with buildings and parking lots, where will we grow our food and where will our children and grandchildren hike and play?

There is a method of land conservation that is entirely voluntary and cost-effective per acre, while at the same time allowing the conserved land to remain private. This method, known as a conservation easement, preserves vital farmland while allowing the land to still be worked, contributing to the local economy and generating jobs.

In 2006, Congress gave conservation a major boost by enacting an enhanced tax incentive. It worked: Land donations increased to nearly 1 million acres per year, many in Ohio. Unfortunately, it expired last year.

Conservation easements are the new face of conservation.

Unlike state parks, these lands can be worked — farmed, ranched or logged — but they can't be turned into a strip mall or a convenience store.

By encouraging land donation, we are ensuring a legacy of farmland and food production for future generations. In Ohio, this has resulted in more than 78,000 acres enrolled in easements, which are monitored by the state's 44 private or volunteer-based land trusts or other qualified entity.

In Pickaway County, a 95-acre portion of the List Family Farm was acquired through a conservation easement. The property includes several "pothole" wetlands that have no natural outlet. They are seasonally inundated and are important migratory bird and waterfowl habitat, as well as a remnant home for a number of rare and endangered plant species.

The once-abundant Pickaway Plains ecology, typified by upland prairies and oak savannahs interspersed with pothole wetlands that were originally on the site, has become rare in Ohio and is well worth saving.

Although the enhanced incentive first passed in 2006, it had expired a number of times prior to last year. It's hard to talk landowners into making major donations when the threat of the tax incentive expiring is always right around the corner.

Congress needs to make the enhanced incentive permanent.

-- **STEVE FLEEGAL**

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