

Preserving Oklahoma Farm and Ranch Land

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The Trust for Public Land is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve lands for the benefit of people. Among our highest priorities is the protection of working farm and ranch lands, which are rapidly disappearing, particularly in and near metropolitan areas. Nationally, more than 3,000 acres of productive farmland is lost each day to development. From 1982 to 1992, almost half of the land developed in Oklahoma was converted from farmland.

To combat the loss of farm and ranch lands in Oklahoma, the Trust for Public Land's Oklahoma State Office has launched the Farm and Ranch Preservation Initiative. In partnership with the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the trust is working with farmers and ranchers to preserve threatened ag lands through conservation easements. Since the initiative was begun just over a year ago, an 800-acre ranch near Barnsdall has been preserved through a donated easement, and a 100-acre farm in Norman will soon be protected through an easement. (The latter is funded in part by a grant from the federal Farmland Protection Program.)

The Trust for Public Land has a long history in protecting agricultural lands and open space through conservation easements. Established in 1972, TPL has protected

over 2,000 sites totaling nearly 2,000,000 acres across the country through fee simple acquisition or easement. We have worked extensively with states to secure federal funding through such programs as Farmland Protection and Forest Legacy for natural resource conservation.

Farm and Ranch Preservation Initiative--Summary

The Farm and Ranch Preservation Initiative will preserve the state's working agricultural lands. Through voluntary conservation easements, the trust will help to alleviate the rapid loss of farms and ranches in or near our cities and communities, thereby preserving an important economic, cultural, and open space resource. The initiative will achieve this goal through the following steps:

1. Developing alliances with agricultural organizations to help educate farmers and ranchers about the initiative
2. Developing sources of funding for acquisition of conservation easements from willing sellers
3. Acquiring easements on agricultural lands restricting commercial or residential development while allowing continued farming or ranching
4. Exploring other issues such as estate taxes that affect the long-term sustainability of the state's farms and ranches

About Jack Blair

Jack Blair joined the TPL's Oklahoma office as project manager in October of 2000. Before coming to TPL, Jack spent five years as an attorney in private practice at the Minneapolis law firm of BlueDog, Olson & Small. His practice included real property law, litigation, and commercial transactions on behalf of Indian tribes and tribal enterprises, and real estate law on behalf of municipal governments.

Jack has a bachelor's degree from Oklahoma State University and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Oklahoma.

About Robert Gregory

Robert Gregory has worked for the Trust for Public Land since January, 1997. During this time, he has served as director of operations and outreach for the southwest region as well as director of development for the southwest region. He currently serves as Oklahoma state director.

Prior to joining the Trust for Public Land, Gregory spent four years as director of development for the Oklahoma chapter of The Nature Conservancy. Additionally, he worked for Oklahoma State University as a development officer for three years. In addition to his conservation experience, Gregory has served as an adjunct instructor in economics for both Tulsa Community College and Santa Fe Community College.

He has a bachelor's degree in economics and a master's degree in business administration, both from Oklahoma State University.

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The Oklahoma office of TPL is now known as Land Legacy

Specific projects will be selected and prioritized using TPL's Oklahoma project criteria and the following:

1. Threats to the land (proximity to new development, tax pressures, etc.)
2. Total acreage to be protected
3. Current land management practices with emphasis on property that is economically and ecologically strong

By the end of 2005, the Trust will have created an alliance of agricultural organizations to help implement the initiative, identified sources of funding for acquisition of easements, and completed not less than seven land protection projects.

Projects for 2002 and 2003

The following is a summary of farm preservation programs underway or envisioned in Oklahoma for the next two years by the Trust for Public Land:

- **Norman Greenbelt** --The Trust will continue its efforts to assist the City of Norman and the Norman Area Land Conservancy in preserving productive farmland on the city's north and west sides to preserve working farms and to create a greenbelt separating Norman from the

Oklahoma City metropolitan area. The Kuhlman Farm, funded in part by the FPP, is among these projects. The trust hopes to preserve two additional farms totaling 300 acres or more by the end of 2003 in the Norman area.

- **Bixby Bottomlands** – Arguably the state's most fertile soil can be found in the Arkansas River bottomlands near Bixby on the south end of the Tulsa metropolitan area. Bixby farms have long been renowned for their outstanding produce. The area is under intense development pressure, and farms there are lost daily. The trust has begun negotiations with area landowners to preserve these farmlands through conservation easements. The trust hopes to protect three farms totaling 500 acres or more in the bottomlands by the end of 2003.

- **Washita Battle National Historic Site** – Working in partnership with the National Park Service, the Trust for Public Land will preserve working farm and ranch lands that comprise the view shed for the Washita Battle National Historic Site. The trust hopes to preserve up to four properties totaling 1,000 acres or more surrounding this important historic resource.