

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the department's primary private lands conservation agency and administers critical agricultural conservation programs. One of the key programs for land trusts is the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Agricultural Land Easements Program (ACEP-ALE). The goal of ACEP-ALE is to conserve working lands such as farmland, rangeland and grasslands.

The Land Trust Alliance serves as a conduit between member land trusts and the NRCS; in turn, land trusts work with landowners to conserve eligible lands through ACEP-ALE. Qualified land trusts that are experienced in the program can apply to become NRCS Certified Entities. Being a certified entity allows for administrative flexibility, which helps streamline projects and get them to the finish line. For accredited land trusts, the certification application process is streamlined.

Nikki Nesbary, NRCS Programs Senior Manager at the Alliance said, "ACEP-ALE Entity Certification can help land trusts get more working lands conserved. With our community's support and the proactive approach the agency [NRCS] is taking, we hope to see more qualified land trusts leverage this important conservation tool."

Some of the benefits of being certified are:

- Greater organizational autonomy and streamlined oversight from the NRCS.
- An extended initial ACEP-ALE agreement term of up to five years, which can be extended to seven. (In comparison, a non-certified entity ACEP-ALE agreement is three years and can be extended to five.)
- A streamlined closing process for ACEP-ALE easements.

Interested in learning more?

- Watch a recording of the January 24, Alliance webinar, [ACEP-ALE Program Opportunities](#)
- [Eligible Entity Certification Toolkit](#) on the Alliance Resource Center
- [See more benefits of being an accredited land trust](#)

