

Michael F. Bennet

United States Senator for Colorado

Hutchinson Ranch in Chaffee County Secures Grant to Complete Conservation Easement

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Bennet Supported Application for Resources to Complete Project's Final Phase

August 30, 2012

Colorado U.S. Senator Michael Bennet applauded the Trust for Public Land and Hutchinson Ranch in Chaffee County for securing a grant to complete the final phase of a 240-acre conservation easement project.

"Hutchinson Ranch is a great example of how Colorado farming and ranching families can take advantage of conservation easement programs that will help our state's rich agricultural heritage thrive for generations," Bennet said. "This project will not only safeguard important agricultural farming land, but it will also protect the mountain grasslands, scenic views, and wildlife habitat near the South Arkansas River."

Tim Wohlgenant, Colorado and Southwest Director for the Trust for Public Land, said, "Funding from the Natural Resource Conservation Service has been a game changer for protecting traditional working agricultural lands in Colorado, not just for the Trust for Public Land, but for land conservation organizations working across the state. Senator Bennet's support for projects like the Hutchinson Ranch conservation easement makes a big difference to the families with whom we work as well as the local communities that value the economic and quality of life benefits agricultural lands provide."

The grant comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and is administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Conservation easements are voluntary agreements that allow landowners to limit development on their property while retaining ownership. The easements are designed to protect land in its undeveloped state and to preserve agricultural heritage and wildlife habitats for future generations.

The Hutchinson Ranch easement was secured through the collaboration of the Arkansas Valley Land Trust, the Trust for Public Land, Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, Chaffee County and the USDA's NRCS Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Bennet secured a provision in the 2012 Farm Bill to enhance conservation easements and provide flexibility that will allow more land owners and producers to preserve their land's agricultural heritage and open space. He also amended the bill to further strengthen the conservation easement programs. Bennet's amendment clarifies the law within the newly consolidated Agricultural Lands Easement program to ensure that farmers and ranchers have more incentives and opportunities to enter into an easement agreement.

In July, Bennet visited Hutchinson Ranch to highlight the importance of conservation easements to preserve ranch land for future generations.

Bennet has been a vocal advocate for Colorado's farmers and ranchers, most recently fighting for the passage of a full five-year reauthorization of the Farm Bill, which, among other things, includes a strong conservation program and provides vital resources to assist farmers and ranchers suffering from drought. The bill passed the Senate in June, but has yet to pass the House.

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