



IN PHOTO, FROM LEFT: State Reps. Harvey Kenton, Dave Wilson, and Charles Postles took part in the anniversary observation and praised the easement program for its positive impact on farming and the environment.

NEWS:

Marking a Milestone Preserving Farmland, Improving the Environment

AUGUST 10, 2018 – Three state legislators with deep roots in Delaware agriculture joined other officials and farmers earlier this week to mark the anniversary of a program that has preserved farmland and the natural environment for the last 25 years.

Operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands. The program has two components:

- **The Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)** helps state and local governments and other organizations to protect and preserve working farmland.
- **The Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE)** are intended to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands.

Since 1993, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Delaware has provided more than \$50 million to help preserve 43,000 wetland and agricultural acres through easements.

The anniversary observation was held on farmland owned by T.S. Smith & Sons in Bridgeville, the site of a 136-acre Wetlands Reserve Easement. Matt Smith, a fourth-generation farmer, said work done by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in conjunction with the easement now allows the Bridgeville Branch to flood into its former channels during high-water events. The result has been improved wetland habitat on the property that hosts fauna as diverse as longnose gar and river otters. The wetlands also help remove nutrients from water that would have otherwise flowed into the Nanticoke River and the Chesapeake Bay beyond.

Aspects of the USDA easement program are similar to Delaware's own Farmland Preservation Program, which has thus far permanently preserved about 127,000 acres of agricultural land by purchasing the property's development rights at steeply discounted rates.

State Rep. Dave Wilson, R-Cedar Creek Hundred, has been an outspoken advocate of the program and has repeatedly fought to keep it funded. "Agriculture is our state's leading industry and our top source of employment and family income downstate," Rep. Wilson said. "Making sure farmland stays in active production is one way of protecting jobs, our economy, and open space."