



East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District Working Farmland Protection Program Transaction

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Contact: Matt Shipkey, Matt@emswcd.org or (503) 935-5374
<http://emswcd.org/>

Important Milestone for the Working Farmland Protection Program

East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) is pleased to announce that the working farmland protection component of its Land Legacy Program has closed on the acquisition of its first-ever working farmland easement. This month, EMSWCD secured the permanent protection of a 57-acre farm property in the Gresham area.

The acquisition of the easement occurred in conjunction with the sale of the property, which EMSWCD had owned since 2011. EMSWCD acquired the property when it was listed for sale and at risk of no longer being available for productive use by the local farming community. Proceeds from the sale will be used by EMSWCD to protect additional working farm properties.

A working farmland easement is a legally binding blueprint for the future of the property which ensures it will remain in active and highly productive agricultural use. The recently released U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture underscores the need for these working farmland protection efforts, with Multnomah County losing an average of 2½ acres of farmland a day during the period 2012 - 2017.

The easement for this property also seeks to address the growing challenges of farmland access and affordability. Farmland affordability is a challenge in Multnomah County, with the Census of Agriculture finding a 75% increase in the value of farmland and buildings from 2012 – 2017 and the second highest average farmland/farm building values of any county in Oregon. The easement incorporates provisions that ensure the property will remain in the ownership of a farmer and by limiting residential infrastructure that could make the property unaffordable for agricultural operators. As part of the transaction, EMSWCD also secured an option to acquire a working farmland easement on another 20-acre property owned by the buyers.



Approximately 14 acres of the property is comprised of forest, steep slopes and streams which drain to the Sandy River. For several years EMSWCD has made significant investments in enhancing the habitat quality of this area through its StreamCare program, which is a voluntary program with private landowners that restores native vegetation along important waterways. The easement will ensure this investment and habitat is forever protected.

“We are excited to be entering into a new phase of our working farmland protection efforts with the acquisition of our first working farmland easement,” said Board Chair Allison Hensey. “This transaction achieves multiple important outcomes – ensuring a future for sustainable agriculture on this property, securing an option to protect an additional 20 acres and safeguarding important habitat, soil and water resources.”

EMSWCD appreciates the partnership with the buyers who made this voluntary transaction possible. “EMSWCD worked creatively and responsively with us to create access to an important farm property and to ensure its future is a ‘forever-farm,’” said the buyers Ted and Karen Sester, who are co-operators of Sester Farms, a substantial commercial nursery operation.

EMSWCD managed and funded this transaction through the working farmland protection component of its Land Legacy Program. The working farmland protection program works to secure the sustainability of the local agricultural economy by ensuring that high quality farmland remains available for use by current and future farmers. For farmers who wish to sell their property outright, EMSWCD can purchase those properties in order to avoid their conversion to other uses. And for farmers who would like to stay on the farm but still realize some of the value of their property, EMSWCD can purchase a working farmland easement.

The East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) is a unit of local government whose mission is to help people care for land and water. The EMSWCD is led by an elected board of five directors and works entirely on a voluntary, non-regulatory basis with landowners, land managers, and other residents east of the Willamette River centerline in Multnomah County. All of the EMSWCD’s work is geared toward keeping water clean, conserving water and keeping soil healthy.

Contact **Matt Shipkey**, our **Land Legacy Program Manager**, with any questions about this specific transaction or the working farmland protection program at Matt@emswcd.org or (503) 935-5374. Learn more about us at <http://emswcd.org>

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