

# Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program

## 2024 EVALUATION REPORT

### OVERVIEW

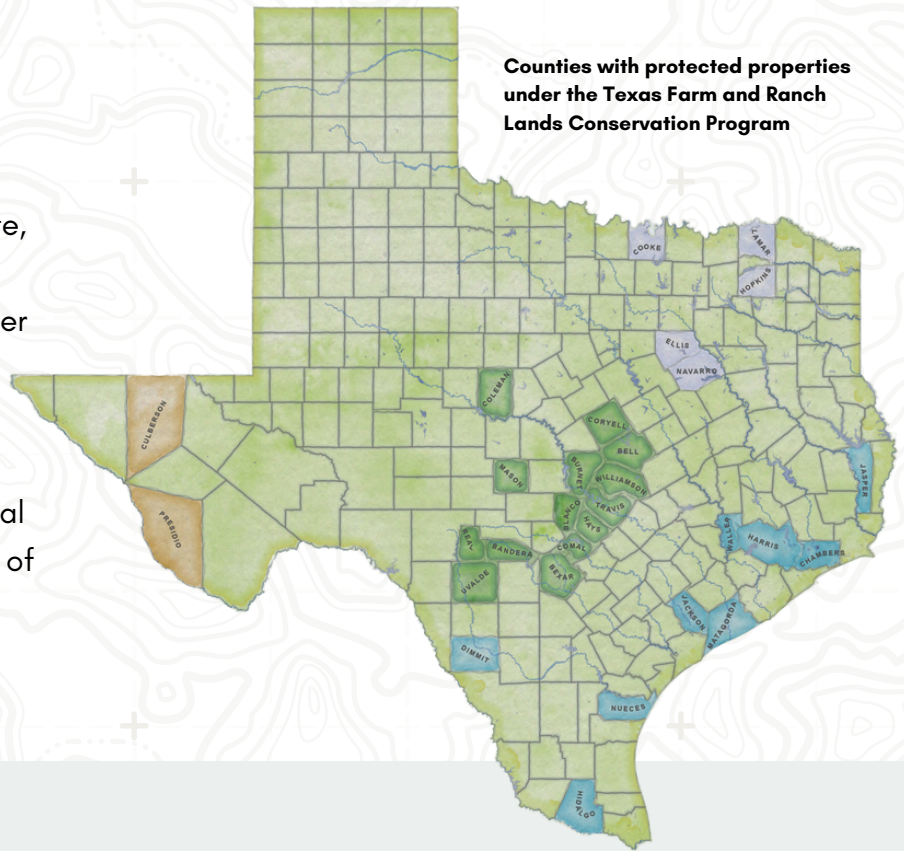
Over 80% of Texas falls under the designation of privately-owned *working lands*. These lands represent farms, ranches and forestlands that help supply food, fiber and water, as well as provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, foster healthy environments and support human wellbeing. Despite the importance of these lands, Texas is losing about 1,000 acres a day to land development and fragmentation, due in large part to rapid population growth and rising land market values.

To help safeguard the public benefits derived from our state's working lands, the Texas Legislature created the *Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program* for the purpose of providing funding to acquire voluntary conservation easements on working lands in partnership with qualified non-profits and governmental agencies. This report examines the economic, agricultural and ecological values secured through the program as well as the financial efficiency of utilizing state funds to protect working lands from fragmentation and development.



## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Since 2016, the program has received approximately \$2M every biennium, resulting in conservation of nearly 47K acres of working lands. The program strives to fund projects across the state, prioritizing ecologically diverse, productive working lands that are under threat of near-term development. Program properties provide localized benefits, such as water resource protection, but also support agricultural production that aids the food security of the entire state.



## Key Findings

The program has proven successful in providing value-added economic, agricultural and ecological benefits to Texas residents. Land trusts across the state have reported high landowner interest in implementing conservations easements, currently outpacing the level of funding available to execute agreements.

State-led efforts to finance working lands conservation are timely, as investments made today will yield exponentially greater economic benefits than a similar investment would yield years from now due to the ever-increasing value of rural lands in Texas. Continuing program support would result in conservation of more working lands that benefit all Texans. Our program assessment determined the following:

### Financial Efficiency

- 23:1 (\$) return on investment
- 9:1 (\$) leverage of external funds
- \$222/acre state contribution
- 60% of applications unfunded

### Agricultural & Ecological Values

- \$590M in ecosystem services over a 20-year period
- \$4.1M/annually in agricultural commodities
- \$16.4M/annually in water replacement savings
- \$22.6M/annually in coastal and inland flood prevention

