



An investment in conservation

A recent report funded by the Department of Agriculture confirmed what many of us take as common sense: There is a direct link between conserving local ranches and strengthening the economy of surrounding communities.

TRUST OUR LAND



KARA HEIDE

We also know that protecting land from uncontrolled development has social, economic and environmental benefits.

In a recently released publication funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture, "The Power of Leveraging Local and Federal Dollars to Strengthen Agricultural Land Easement Investments," four case studies illustrate this point. Find it at www.lta.org/policy/frppbenefits.

Investing more than \$5 billion per year in a suite of conservation programs, the Farm Bill far exceeds other federal sources of conservation funding.

Land trusts and local governments have leveraged this funding into millions of acres of permanently conserved agricultural and working ranch lands.

The new Farm Bill's Agricultural Land Easement program will help local ranchers and forest owners here in Eagle County to conserve their land so they'll be able to pass it on to their children and grandchildren, and keep it in productive use.

Western ranching heritage has been a way of life, as well as an economic driver in Eagle County for generations. Working cattle, sheep and horse ranches continue to thrive in our community, living off the land as they have for hundreds of years.

We have conserved thousands of acres of ranch land and local forest in Eagle County due to the generosity of ranch owners, along with help from local conservationists, organizations like Trout Unlimited, the Mule Deer Foundation and Eagle County's Open Space department.

However, more work can and should be done to conserve local ranches and forests to strengthen the economy of our surrounding rural communities. A renewal of the Farm Bill and the conservation programs it authorizes will assist with our important local land protection efforts.

Failure to enact a five-year Farm Bill before Congress adjourns could slash this important funding by \$500 million. The Eagle Valley Land Trust urges the Colorado Congressional delegation to protect food and fiber production, clean water, wildlife habitat and our Western ranching heritage by passing the Farm Bill this year.

It's a good investment for future generations of farmers, ranchers and all Americans.

Kara Heide is the executive director of the Eagle Valley Land Trust. To learn more about your local Land Trust, or about the current Farm Bill and its impact on local ranch land conservation, contact her at kara@evlt.org or 970-748-7654.