



# Arizona Department of Agriculture

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OFFICE OF DIRECTOR

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Conservation Acquisition Board Members  
State Parks Department

**FROM:** Nicole Waldron, Department of Agriculture *Nicole Waldron*

**RE:** Growing Smarter Grant Proposal

**DATE:** April 26, 2000

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The Growing Smarter Act of 1998 contained numerous comprehensive municipal, county and State Land Department land use planning and zoning reforms and provided for the acquisition and maintenance of open spaces.

The purpose of the Growing Smarter landowner, grazing and agricultural lessee open space program (hereafter referred to as the "Open Space Reserve Program (OSRP) contained in §41-511.23.G (2) is to fund grants from monies in the Public Conservation Account "to provide wildlife habitat or other public benefits that preserve open space."

The Growing Smarter Public Conservation Account dedicates 10% in any fiscal year to the Open Space Reserve Program. The grants shall be issued to individual landowners or grazing or agricultural lessees of State or Federal lands who contract with the Arizona State Parks Board to implement conservation based management alternatives using livestock or crop production practices, or reduce livestock or crop production, to provide wildlife habitat or other public benefits that preserve open space.

This component of the Act, which relates to ranching and farming families being able to contract with the State Parks Board to provide public benefits while preserving and enhancing open space, is mirrored after a very successful the Federal Conservation Reserve Program in the Midwest.

This localized preservation program will provide more benefits for fewer dollars in our efforts to reduce the fragmentation of open spaces in the rural areas. As the public continues to demand more benefits from open spaces in the rural areas, the pressure for farming and ranching families to sell privately held intermingled fragments to a multitude of buyers (40 acre ranchettes), eventually becomes their most feasible option for relief.

The OSRP will give individuals the ability to contract with State Parks to provide enhanced open space access, and other public benefits create an option that will keep the intermingled parcels from being fragmented further.

The OSRP is designed to be accessed by the following two avenues of compliance which, when approved by the Arizona Department of Agriculture and State Parks, shall qualify for all or a portion of the 10% Public Conservation Account monies:

- **Conservation Reduction in Livestock or Crop Production**

This section protects open spaces by recognizing the need to relieve the development pressures upon many of Arizona's farming and ranching families. They are under pressures to provide greater public benefits from the lands they manage. These pressures include protection and enhancement of riparian areas, Endangered Species, and expanding wildlife populations. For many of these families a decrease in the number of livestock or crops produced on a parcel of land is either required or negotiated through a planning process. Grants for this segment of the program are available when the individual demonstrates a reduction in crop production or livestock maintenance for wildlife, endangered species or other habitat protection, water or air quality or other public benefits that promote and preserve open space.

You'll note that HB2706 gives priority to those applicants who wish to contract with State Parks through this avenue by reducing livestock. Therefore, in reviewing the applications for these grant monies, the Department of Agriculture agrees that the selection process prioritizes these applications before looking at the second group for funding.

The individual will contract with the State Parks Board to set aside livestock or crop production for a given period of time, up to ten years, and continue to manage the lands for the remaining livestock or crop production and open space values. The open space values are to be protected by an agreement that none of the lands under control or management of the individual shall be fragmented or subject to development, not consistent with the existing use, during the term of the grant contract. The annual actual use numbers compared to prior use shall document the reduction of livestock numbers. Crop production reduction within a specified allotment shall be subject to third-party verification by the Arizona Department of Agriculture.

- **Conservation Based Livestock & Crop Production Alternatives**

This grant option protects open spaces by recognizing the implementation of production management alternatives using livestock or crop production. Grants for this segment of the Open Space Reserve Program are available when the individual presents a science-based management plan that adheres to and measures the results of enhanced stewardship. Individuals can demonstrate compliance by documenting this level of stewardship with independent third-party review by the Arizona Department of Agriculture throughout the duration of the grant period.

### **Eligible Applicants**

Any individual landowner or grazing or agricultural lessee of State or Federal lands who is in the business of professionally producing livestock or crop production is eligible for competitive review for the Public Conservation Account monies.

### **Eligible Projects**

Any project resulting in the development of public benefits that preserve open space while implementing either conservation based agricultural production practices or crop/livestock production reduction shall be eligible for competitive review for the Public Conservation Account monies.

### **Grant Selection Committee**

The Arizona Department of Agriculture shall work directly with State Parks staff to create a grant selection committee that will review the applications and rank them according to their score on each of the criteria.

Those criteria will include:

Actual Conservation Actions (with priority being given to livestock reductions)  
On the ground projects (not research)  
Ability to measure success of project (built in performance measures)  
Cost / Benefit