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**NEW JERSEY FARM BUREAU APPLAUDS GOVERNOR'S REFUSAL TO INTERFERE WITH
'PROCESS' OF HIGHLANDS REGIONAL MASTER PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

Trenton, NJ (January 30, 2008) -- The New Jersey Farm Bureau says this is the wrong time to interfere with the Highlands planning process, and applauds the governor's refusal to issue an executive order to do so. The call by environmental groups for the governor to declare a moratorium on major development until the Regional Master Plan (RMP) is in place violates the spirit of the planning process. While farmers and landowners have been just as frustrated as the environmental interests by the delay in the development and the adoption of the RMP, it has been farmers in the Highlands region who have spent the last three and a half years in limbo over their future.

"Changing the rules by which the planning process goes forward this late in the process would be unfair" Says Richard Nieuwenhuis, president of the Farm Bureau. "By his refusal to intervene, it's obvious that the governor understands the importance of allowing the current process continue to plan adoption and then see if any corrective legislative measures need to be taken. We know of several areas that we would like to see fixed at that time. But planning, as we all know, requires a balancing of multiple interests for the public good."

Farm Bureau maintains that the call for a moratorium on major development by the very groups that supported and pushed for the Highlands Act in the first place is an end run around the flexibility that the legislature built into the act. The legislature set up a master planning process, which allows groups and individuals to represent their interests to the council during the planning processes. Now some of these groups call for a change in the planning criteria before the plan is even finalized. The draft RMP includes a modest proposal for clustering in limited areas, which may have some benefit of staving off complete loss of land values.

“The RMP should not be turned into a wilderness management plan,” says Nieuwenhuis. “This is a region with agriculture, agri-tourism, large towns with diverse industries and businesses, and major highways that funnel traffic between Pennsylvania and New York. We cannot allow a management plan that ultimately sucks the vitality out of this region and leaves it virtually on welfare. Preservation and resource protection is important, but we must explore many options as means to do it.”

During development of the Highlands Act, landowners were promised that their land value equity would be treated fairly, with a land acquisition fund created to help compensate them for any loss of land use through heavy regulation. Funding sources have yet to be even explored, other than the Garden State Preservation Trust-- a fund that is now depleted, and living off a one-year stopgap.

“If the governor is going to take any action, he should ensure that funding for acquisition s in place before the plan is adopted,” concludes Nieuwenhuis.

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