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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CAN THE HIGHLANDS PLAN BE TRUE TO ITS INTENT?**

**RMP LOOKS LIKE LAYERS OF REGULATIONS AND NOT A REGIONAL MASTER PLAN**

**TRENTON, NJ (July 7, 2008)** – New Jersey Farm Bureau believes that the upcoming Regional Master Plan (RMP) for the Highlands will miss the mark of fulfilling its legislative mandate, saying critical pieces will be missing in favor of blind environmental regulation.

“All through this process, Farm Bureau has called for a Regional Master Plan that has distinct components addressing places for economic activity, transportation, housing, open space, agriculture, and protection of environmental resources,” said Farm Bureau’s president Richard Nieuwenhuis. “What we are seeing in the draft RMP is that planning has been lost in confusing layers of data sets creating new regulation that will bewilder local governments and Highlands residents,” he said.

The Highlands Council is on track to vote on final adoption of the Regional Master Plan on July 17. Farm Bureau believes the following statutory goals are missing and need to be addressed before the Plan can be approved:

- Clarification that the Planning Area half of the region allows for voluntary compliance by local municipalities. The Council must reverse its decision to mandate its own nitrate and other environmental standards in the Planning Area through the WQMP process of the DEP. Doing so nullifies the voluntary nature of the Planning Area.

- Clarification that existing and future farming practices of all Highlands region farmers are not disqualified or jeopardized by terms of the RMP.

- Use of a cluster development option for landowners that maintains protection for landowner equity.

- Assurance that the TDR program mandates are accomplished or have the likelihood of being immediately accomplished when the Plan is set for a vote. (falling far short of designating 4% of the region as potential TDR receiving areas, as stated in the Act, will undermine the TDR program).

- Assurance that the single-family housing exemption will be truly exempt from the RMP, DEP rules or any municipal master plan or zoning ordinances developed to conform to the RMP.

- Submission of a thorough economic impact statement of the proposed RMP.

The Council has never seen more than five or six layers of data layer regulation applied on a map at one time, when more than fifty kinds of regulation will be used to determine what can happen to a parcel of land. Furthermore, Farm Bureau questions how Council members can vote for a plan when they haven't fully considered the application of these "data layers" to a county, town or a landowner?

The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act is intended to help plan for the economic and future growth of the region while protecting the most critical water resources of the region. Instead, we have overkill of environmental protections, which will allow neither growth nor economic future for the region, according to the Farm Bureau.

"At its core, the Act was intended to protect critical water and forest resources to preserve them for generations to come, while planning for and encouraging future growth in the region. There is a disconnect between the policies being adopted by the Council and the goals and objectives of the Act and the Plan," said Nieuwenhuis.

"Unless these Master Plan features are incorporated, we believe the Regional Master Plan is not ready for final adoption."

For further information, contact the New Jersey Farm Bureau, at The Farmhouse, 168 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608. Phone 609-393-7163; fax 609-393-7072; email [mail@njfb.org](mailto:mail@njfb.org); website [www.njfb.org](http://www.njfb.org)

The New Jersey Farm Bureau is a non-profit member organization of 14,000+ farmers and farm-related individuals within the Garden State. It is the only organization solely dedicated to representing the grass- roots interests and directives of its members in educating all levels of government and the public on the farm community's policies and positions. The Farm Bureau also takes a lead in seeking out initiatives, activities and ventures to enhance the profitability of producer members and ensure the viability of agriculture in New Jersey -- *the Garden State for Good Reason -- our farms.*

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