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**NEW JERSEY NEEDS A 'YES' VOTE ON NOVEMBER BALLOT QUESTION
FUNDING GARDEN STATE OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION TRUST
New Jersey Farm Bureau Asserts Importance of Renewed Funding**

TRENTON, NJ (September 20, 2007) -- Farmland is active open space and must be preserved as a means of sustaining agriculture in the most densely populated state in the nation, asserts the New Jersey Farm Bureau, as it joins a coalition of conservation groups in a *Keep It Green Campaign*. The coalition seeks to secure continued funding for the Garden State Preservation Trust on the November 6th ballot and the message is appearing on flyers and banners throughout the state. Farmers and landowners have a lot at stake in the 2007 campaign, since the \$200 million referendum enables the continuation of providing property owners fair market value compensation. Historically, agriculture has received a 40% share of the trust funds, which Farm Bureau continues to support.

The Farm Bureau stresses that preserved farmland is a tax-paying asset for municipal and county governments. Funding from the Garden State Preservation Trust maintains working farms, protects soil and water resources, ensures access to locally grown produce and other farm products, allows for privately maintained open space and assists towns by avoiding consequences of new development (traffic congestion, costly municipal services).

"Cows don't go to school, but farmers do pay taxes," says Farm Bureau President Richard Nieuwenhuis. "An acre of farmland preserved and not turned into housing pays for itself in less than two years. Farmers also are private stewards of the land – at no cost to taxpayers, once development rights have been acquired -- as opposed to leaving this task to government, which must assume financial responsibility for maintaining preserved open space."

This year, for the first time, the state preserved more farmland than it lost, according to a recent Rutgers University study, but the study shows it still loses 50 acres of open space a day and will reach build-out in less than 25 years without help from the open-space trust.

The goal of the State Agriculture Development Committee's (SADC) is to preserve 600,000 acres and thus ensure an adequate land base for New Jersey agriculture in the future. To date, 1,600

farms have been enrolled in the preservation program, covering 160,000 acres of permanently protected farmland, representing 17% of the state's nearly 821,000 farmland acres-- the highest percentage of deed-restricted farmland in the nation.

"With food safety becoming increasingly important, preserved farmland assures a renewable, safe source of locally grown food," says Nieuwenhuis. "People who buy from local farmers develop a trust relationship with them. Both entities need each other; thus it's in each of their best interests that farmers continue growing and harvesting food in close proximity to population centers."

How Farmland Preservation Works

"It is important that residents of the state understand how the preservation program works; it's not any sort of gift to farmers," says Nieuwenhuis. "Farm properties are tax ratables. A survey Farm Bureau commissioned in 2005 showed that a majority of the state's likely voters (53%) know little or nothing about the farmland preservation program, while at the same time, 85% said farming should play a valuable role in the future of New Jersey. If farming is to remain viable, the state must allocate sufficient funding to divert farmland from development."

Landowners who want to continue farming their land or insure that any land sold continues in agriculture can sell their development rights to the SADC, counties, municipalities or nonprofit organizations. The sale price is based on the *difference* between what a developer would pay for the land and what it is worth for agriculture. It is not an outright sale for the highest use, where the farmer sells for a greater price. He or she is paid only the easement value -- and continues to own and pay taxes on the land. The land can be sold to another farmer, but the deed is restricted to agriculture.

For example, the value of a farm for development might be \$12,000/acre, while the value for agriculture use is only \$4,000/acre. In selling development rights, the farmer would receive a one-time payment of \$8,000/acre and agree to deed-restrict the land to agriculture. Naturally, a preserved farm has a lower resale value than property that is fully developable. An alternative is selling the farm outright at fair market value to one of the authorized entities, which in turn can resell it for agricultural use. This can be an effective means to get farmland into the hands of new farmers, who are just starting in agriculture.

For further information, contact Peter Furey or Ed Wengryn at 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; website www.njfb.org

The New Jersey Farm Bureau is a non-profit member organization of more than 16,000 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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