

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **GOVERNOR PRESENTS CHECKS TOTALING \$4.6 MILLION FOR FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN HUNTERDON AND SOMERSET COUNTIES**

Gov. Christie Whitman today demonstrated her commitment to farmland and open space preservation when she presented two checks totaling \$4.6 million for the preservation of 990 acres of farmland in Hunterdon and Somerset Counties. The Governor made the presentation during a visit to the Whistle Stop Farm and Nursery in Ringoes where she picked blueberries and enjoyed a hay ride with local Girl Scouts.

"Today, we are taking another important step in ensuring that family farms like these remain farms in the future," the Governor said. "We lose over 10,000 acres or more each year to development. Once we lose this land, it's lost forever. For all the good that comes from houses and businesses, we put more pressure on infrastructure with greater demands on our roads and bridges."

Gov. Whitman presented a check for \$2,153,255 representing the state's share of funding for the preservation of six farms on 738 acres to Hunterdon County Freeholder Director George Melick.

The Hunterdon County share of the cost of easement is \$485,1558 while Bethlehem Township is contributing \$213,148 and Readington Township is providing \$274,410.

The Governor also presented a check for \$1,809,330 to help fund the preservation of two farms on 252 acres in Somerset County to Somerset County Freeholder Kenneth Scherer. Scherer is also Somerset County Agriculture Development Board Liaison. The County share of the cost of easement is \$676,770.

The state funds were appropriated from the 1995 Green Acres, Farmland and Historic Preservation and Blue Acres Bond issue.

The Governor said that owners of 60 other farms in Hunterdon County and 11 in Somerset County, covering more than 9,600 acres, could receive preservation grants if the funds were available.

According to Gov. Whitman, East Amwell Mayor Les Hamilton and the Township Committee have been working with property owners to preserve more than 1,500 acres of farmland. She said voluntary donations of land or development rights have preserved almost 500 acres.

"We have to increase commitments like these before it's too late," Gov. Whitman said. "Before we lose precious land to development. Before we lose the 'Garden' in the Garden State. Before our grandchildren lose the chance to enjoy the New Jersey we know."

Gov. Whitman said that her administration has been working closely with the legislature on a plan that would enable the state to reach her goal of preserving one million acres of farmland and open space in the next ten years.

She said Senate President Donald T. DeFrancesco (R- Middlesex/Morris/Somerset and Union) and Assembly Member Leonard Lance (R-Warren/Hunterdon/Mercer) will introduce legislation today that will ask voters to dedicate nearly \$100 million out of each year's state budget to finance the bonds needed to reach her goal of preserving one million acres of land.

"A million acres isn't just a number I dreamed up," she said. "Our Department of Agriculture says that we must preserve 500,000 acres of farmland to keep agriculture viable in New Jersey industry. The Council of New Jersey Outdoors recommended preserving a combined total of one million acres of farmland and open space within the next decade."

"Let's face the facts," the Governor said. "We need to persevere one million acres. It's a legacy our grandchildren and their grandchildren deserve."