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200th Farm Preserved in Salem County

UPPER PITTSBORO – Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher today joined Salem County Freeholder Director Lee R. Ware and New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) Executive Director Michele Byers in announcing the preservation of the 200th farm in Salem County – the 51-acre Kern farm in Upper Pittsgrove.

“We’re happy to join Salem County and NJCF in celebrating the County’s 200th preserved farm,” said Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher. “The State has been a strong partner in farmland preservation in Salem County, providing three-quarters of the total \$96 million invested in farmland preservation to date. We look forward to continuing our efforts to ensure agriculture remains an important part of the economy and way of life here.”

“Salem County is number one in the state for preserved farmland, and it is because of the partnerships between the State, County, municipalities, private groups, and citizens,” said Freeholder Director Ware. “Farmland preservation is not just about preserving land – it preserves our history and our legacy for future generations.”

NJCF purchased the development rights to the 51-acre Kern farm – making it the County’s 200th preserved farm – for \$509,990. That purchase was made possible by 50 percent cost-sharing grants from the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service through its Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

“New Jersey Conservation Foundation is extremely proud to be part of Salem County’s 200th preserved farm,” said NJCF Executive Director Byers. “The Kern family is a great example of how farmland preservation helps keep agriculture viable by allowing farmers to expand and innovate.”

The 51-acre Kern farm is owned by Eric Kern, who also is in the process of purchasing from his mother Jeanette the approximately 300-acre family farm that she and her husband preserved in 2000. The farmland preservation announcement was made at the family farm. Kern credits farmland preservation for helping to make his purchase of that farm possible.

“Farmland preservation has given me the opportunity to buy my family’s farm at a price I can afford,” said Kern, a fourth-generation farmer. The sale of development rights on his 51-acre parcel, less than a mile away, also helped make it possible for him to reinvest to expand his farming operation.

Kern has been farming since he graduated college in the early 1990s. He took over the farm operation from his father Walter, who started with 50 acres in 1955 and gradually purchased more land. Today, Eric Kern farms the family farm, about 110 acres of his own land and 2,500 additional leased or custom-worked acres mostly in Salem County, growing grain and processed vegetables.

The SADC administers New Jersey’s Farmland Preservation Program. To date, more than 181,000 acres of farmland have been permanently preserved statewide under the program, including 26,262 acres in Salem County. Salem County ranks first statewide in acreage of preserved farmland under the Farmland Preservation Program and second in number of preserved farms under the program. Upper Pittsgrove Township is the second leading municipality in the state in farmland preservation, with 7,236 acres preserved under the program.

NJCF began preserving farmland in Salem County in 1991, with 1,060 acres preserved to date. It was the first nonprofit to cost-share in farmland preservation with both the State and Salem County, and is a sponsor of the www.salemcountyagritourism.com website.

On Election Day, New Jersey voters will be asked to approve Public Question #1 – the Green Acres, Water Supply and Floodplain Protection, and Farmland and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2009. If passed, the Act would authorize new funding that would enable New Jersey to continue preserving farmland and historic properties; purchase open space for recreation or conservation; fund park improvements; and purchase as open space properties prone to flooding.

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