

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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RELEASE: August 19, 1999

Gov. Whitman Tours Somerset County Signs Emergency Regs to Assist Farmers in Drought, Presents \$3 million Check for Open Space Preservation

Gov. Christie Whitman today toured Somerset County, beginning the day with a ceremonial presentation of a \$3 million check to county officials for open-space land designated for nature trails and recreation. At the end of the day, the Governor signed emergency regulations at the Somerset County Fair to expedite the process of joining the Farmland Preservation Program in an effort to help farmers who are in severe financial difficulty due to the drought.

At the first stop of the day the Governor visited the site of the open-space land purchased from AT&T; in Bernards Township, where she praised the company and government officials for preserving the land from development.

"I am happy to be here today as we add another 120 acres to the total amount of land preserved - and come that much closer to our million-acre goal," said Gov. Whitman. "This is a great example of how companies like AT&T; can work with local and county officials and with the state to preserve land where it makes the most sense. Improving the quality of life helps attract and retain a quality workforce. Preserving open space is good business, and good business preserves open space" the Governor said.

AT&T; sold the land for \$5.2 million with the state contributing \$3 million, the county \$900,000 and Bernards Township paying \$1.3 million. The sale price was \$1 million less than the appraised value.

Governor Tours State-of-the-Art Research Facility in Bridgewater

Following the visit to Bernards Township, the Gov. Whitman headed to Bridgewater where she toured the state-of-the-art biotechnology research laboratories at the Hoechst Marion Roussel US corporate headquarters. The German-based company opened the new \$45 million research facility last year, and has received two awards - the "Economic Vitality Award" for its economic impact on the local community and the "New Good Neighbor Award" for its positive impact on the state.

"I am continually impressed with and proud of what I see in the pharmaceutical industry in our state. I intend to continue finding ways to support this talented, high-skilled workforce of more than 60,000 that is helping us move into a future that includes improved public health through their research and a continued strong economy through their presence in New Jersey," said Gov. Whitman.

Governor Praises Hillsborough's Plans for New Town Center, Promises to Ease Traffic with Route 206 By-pass and Truck Ban

The next stop in the Somerset County tour was in Hillsborough Township, where Gov. Whitman applauded the residents and township officials for their plans for a town center, the first in Hillsborough's history, to create an identity and a center of commerce and community life. Through surveys, the residents participated in all aspects of the design of the new town center, from architecture to landscaping to recreational facilities.

Key to the plans for the new town center is the state's design and construction of a 4.3 mile by-pass which will take Route 206 around, rather than through the center of Hillsborough. The Hillsborough by-pass is one part of a three-part, \$145 million project by the Department of Transportation to improve the heavily-traveled highway from Montgomery Township through Hillsborough Township to Raritan Township. Design work for the by-pass is underway and the Department of Transportation will begin right-of-way acquisitions in September.

While the completion of the by-pass to alleviate traffic through Hillsborough is a few years away, the Governor reiterated her commitment to restrict interstate trucks traveling through New Jersey to the National Highway Network, and ban them from local highways such as Route 206.

"We are telling interstate truckers to use the National Network Highways. That's what they are there for. Local roads are for local use," said the Governor.

Governor Signs Emergency Regulations to Aid Farmer

The Governor left Hillsborough and headed to the Somerset County 4-H Fair in Bridgewater, where she joined Secretary of Agriculture Art Brown and signed emergency regulations to accelerate the process for farmers to enter the Farmland Preservation Program, allowing them to get cash up-front for selling the rights to develop the land to the state.

"This may be the truest form of Farmland Preservation," Gov. Whitman said. "We want to make sure, during these tough times, that our farmers have alternatives to selling their farms for development. We are not going to lose any farms because of the drought. If we lose our farms, we lose the Garden State," said the Governor.

Under the preservation program, the farmers still own the land and therefore may pass it on or sell it, but only for continued use as farmland.