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NEWS RELEASE

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RELEASE: April 21, 1998

GOVERNOR HIKES WITH AREA STUDENTS, INKS BILLS TO PRESERVE FARMLAND, PERMANENTLY PROTECT IRREPLACEABLE OPEN SPACE

On the eve of Earth Day, Gov. Christie Whitman today signed three bills committing more than \$22.5 million to the preservation of farmland and the permanent protection of more than 7,000 acres of open space in New Jersey. The legislation preserves 57 farms in 14 New Jersey counties.

"Today I am proud to be preserving open space for our future generations," said Gov. Whitman. "The laws that I have signed today will ensure that our grandchildren will have cleaner air and water and will be able to enjoy the fruits of our farmland for many years to come. Today, we move one step closer to reaching the goal that I set for preserving one million acres of open space in New Jersey over the next decade."

"New Jerseyans value our open space where they can walk, hike and enjoy nature," said Gov. Whitman. "I am proud of New Jersey's commitment to open space, proud that together we have preserved more than 115,000 acres over the last four years. Together, we will continue that commitment and continue to invest in the future."

Gov. Whitman signed the legislation at the conclusion of an approximate 1mile mountain hike with students from Morristown High School and Frelinghuysen Middle School. The Governor and students discussed the importance of Earth Day and the need for preserving farmland and open space to secure a high quality of life for future generations.

"Here in New Jersey we appreciate the environmental and economic benefits that our agriculture industry offers to us and our families," NJ Agriculture Secretary Art Brown Jr. noted. "Our Farmland Preservation Program has always enjoyed strong support from urban, suburban and rural New Jerseyans who all understand the importance of our effort to preserve valuable, irreplaceable farmland."

The Governor signed **A-1593**, sponsored by Assembly Speaker Jack Collins (R-Salem/ Cumberland/Gloucester), Assembly Member Joseph Malone (R-Burlington/ Monmouth/Ocean), and Senators Raymond Zane (D-Salem/Cumberland/Gloucester) and Robert Singer (R-Burlington/ Monmouth/Ocean), which appropriates \$22.5 million from the "Green Acres, Farmland and Historic Preservation, and Blue Acres Bond Act of 1995" for farmland preservation, soil and water conservation projects throughout New Jersey. The bill approves funding of 22 farmland preservation projects in southern New Jersey. This legislation provides funding for projects in southern New Jersey listed in this bill, as well as projects in northern and central New Jersey listed in A-1594 and A-1595.

The funds will be used to provide grants to municipalities and counties for up to 80 percent of the cost of acquisition of development easements on farmland and for up to 100 percent of the cost of acquisition of development easements under such emergency conditions as the State Agriculture Development Committee

determines. The funds will also provide qualifying farmland owners with grants for 50 percent of the cost of soil and water conservation projects.

The Governor signed **A-1594**, sponsored by Assembly members Barbara Wright (R-Mercer/ Middlesex) and Claire Farragher (R- Monmouth) and Senators Peter Inverso (R-Mercer/Middlesex) and John Bennett (R-Monmouth) which approves eligibility for funding of 18 farmland preservation projects in central New Jersey through the "Green Acres, Farmland and Historic Preservation and Blue Acres Bond Act of 1995."

The Governor also signed **A-1595**, sponsored by Assembly Members Connie Myers (R-Warren/ Hunterdon/Mercer) and Pete Biondi (R- Morris/Somerset) and Senators Walter Kavanaugh (R-Morris/ Somerset) and William Schluter (R-Warren/Hunterdon/Mercer), which approves funding for 17 projects in northern New Jersey through "Green Acres, Farmland and Historic Preservation and Blue Acres Bond Act of 1995."

Gov. Whitman has demonstrated a strong commitment to environmental protection and the preservation of open space throughout her administration. She has approved the preservation of more than 115,000 acres of open space. The Whitman Administration has also permanently preserved more than 23,500,000 acres of farmland, more than any governor in New Jersey during a four year period. Gov. Whitman supported the 1995 Green Acres Bond Act that provided \$340 million to preserve open space, farmland and coastal and inland flood plains.

During her Inaugural Address in January, Gov. Whitman pledged to protect 300,000 acres of land during her second term and set a goal for New Jersey to preserve one million acres in the next ten years. The Governor is currently working to develop a permanent and stable source of funding to support her open space preservation goals and all future preservation projects.