

Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
609-777-2600
Debbie Lawler (AG)
609-292-8896
RELEASE: August 3, 1999

Governor Seeks Federal Help for Farmers Affected by Drought

Standing in front of drought-decimated alfalfa fields in Somerset County, Governor Christie Whitman announced today that she will ask US Department of Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman for a statewide disaster designation as a result of the extremely hot, dry conditions that have gripped the Garden State this summer.

Joining the Governor for the announcement were state Agriculture Secretary Art Brown, Jr., and Dave and Paula Kanach, owners of River Lea Farm in Branchburg, which the Governor toured prior to her announcement.

Based on figures Brown provided yesterday, the Governor today signed a letter to Secretary Glickman requesting that a federal disaster declaration be issued for 19 primary counties and for Hudson and Union Counties as contiguous counties beginning May 1, 1999, and continuing. This declaration will allow farmers to apply for emergency loans from the USDA, from the Farm Service Agency's farm credit programs, and for other relief that may be available from the USDA.

Preliminary data indicated that more than 7,000 family farms covering about 406,000 acres have suffered crop losses ranging from 20 percent to 100 percent. Brown requested preliminary damage assessments from USDA's State Emergency Board last week.

Noting that this year's growing season had been "anything but typical," Whitman said that nearly all of New Jersey's family-owned farms have suffered tremendously from this year's extreme heat and drought. "We must do whatever we can to protect our farms," she said.

"Since I became the Secretary of Agriculture in 1982, I can't remember a year when so many crops were so badly damaged by heat and drought," Brown said. "Grain and forage crops seem to be hit the hardest but even our vegetable growers, most of whom irrigate their crops, have had weather-related problems since the beginning of May."

Brown said virtually every facet of the industry has been adversely affected by unusually high temperatures and low rainfall:

- The nursery industry's sales to landscapers and homeowners have been reduced in the face of local water restrictions.
- Dairy farmers are experiencing drops of 20 percent or more in milk production as dairy cows cope with high temperatures and loss of grazing.

- Livestock producers, with no pasture to graze their animals, have tapped into hay supplies they would have used this winter and will have to find alternate feed sources for their animals.
- Many dairy and livestock producers have been doubly affected since they also grow the grain and forage crops that have been hardest hit by this year's bad weather.
- Vegetable growers, faced with huge fuel and utility bills and added labor costs resulting from constant irrigation, are working overtime to harvest their crops only to find that prices in the marketplace are some of the lowest in years.