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NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Whitman Announces Toll-free Number for Farmers, Information Available on Programs and Services for Drought Losses

New Jersey farmers who need help dealing with the devastating effects of the drought, and those who can offer help to other farmers, have a toll-free hot line, announced Gov. Christie Whitman. The number, 1-877-788-7785, is available immediately, and every Monday through Friday, from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.

"While we move forward with our efforts to get financial relief to farmers and to conserve water through the declaration of a drought emergency, we are offering this immediate solution to coordinate information and answer questions," Gov. Whitman said.

"It is imperative that we offer continued support in whatever way possible to this \$800 million-a-year industry - not only from an economic point of view but also because our farms define us as 'The Garden State'," Whitman added.

The new hot line is being operated by the [Department of Agriculture](#) and is for farmers only: Calls from homeowners or others who have questions about the drought will be re-directed to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Hot line staffers are prepared to offer a wide range of information including:

- how to register crop losses with the USDA's Farm Services Agency, a necessary first step to be eligible for low-interest loans under the federal disaster declared last week;
- how to donate hay, grain, corn or transportation services to other farmers;
- how to obtain supplies and services donated by other farmers;
- how to get grain and field corn tested to ensure it is safe to feed to livestock;
- how to obtain emergency supplies of water for livestock;
- how to find financial advice and assistance needed to manage the farm business during the drought crisis;
- how to enter into the Farmland Preservation Program;
- how to contact various resource agencies such as agricultural extension agents, regional Farm Services Offices, and even local stress management counselors.

"This is the worst drought New Jersey farmers have experienced in three decades," said Agriculture Secretary Art Brown, Jr., "and we want to give farmers and agricultural businesses a centralized information office where they can get as much information and as many useful contacts as possible to help get them through this economically devastating year."

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