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NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Whitman Signs Emergency Rules to Assist Farmers in Drought, Asks President Clinton for Help Getting Federal Emergency Grants

Governor Christie Whitman today will sign emergency rules adopted yesterday by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) to accelerate the process for farmers who want to join the Farmland Preservation Program and are experiencing cash-flow problems due to the severe drought.

"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.

In the Governor's continuing effort to provide every available source of financial assistance for New Jersey farmers, she today wrote to President Clinton asking him to make a formal request to Congress to provide federal emergency grant assistance to farmers in New Jersey and the Mid-Atlantic state.

"Emergency federal grants are essential to ensuring that our farmers will survive and that the Garden State will be green once again," the Governor said. "It is my hope that the President and Congress will work together to save the future of farms and farming communities in New Jersey and throughout the Mid- Atlantic."

The new emergency regulations being signed by the Governor are geared specifically to drought- stricken farmers and include special drought-related crop-yield criteria. Under the regulations, interested eligible farmers can work directly with the SADC through a streamlined procedure to permanently preserve their farmland by selling the development rights on the property to the SADC. The state's purchase of development easements directly from farmers is authorized under the recently-enacted Garden State Preservation Trust Act.

The state has made \$12 million immediately available for this initiative, with additional funding as demand increases. The funding will come from the Garden State Preservation Trust Fund, established by legislation signed by the Governor in June to create a stable source of funding to preserve one million acres of open space over the next ten years.

The streamlined process includes two independent professional appraisals of the property followed by professional review of the appraisals to establish the fair market value of the development easement (the difference between the price the

land would bring if sold for development compared to the price of the land if sold for agricultural use).

"Farmers who want to permanently protect their land can still enter the program through the traditional process. This emergency action offers one additional possibility a farmer may want to pursue to reduce the economic stress caused by this year's drought," said Art Brown, Jr., Secretary of Agriculture and SADC chairman.