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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor, Sen. Torricelli Take Aerial Tour to Survey Farmland and Open Space, Joined by Rep. Pappas to Highlight Need for Preservation, Governor Endorses Public Question on Horse Racing

Gov. Christie Whitman today was joined by U.S. Sen. Robert Torricelli for an aerial tour of the rolling farmland and open space in Hunterdon County. Gov. Whitman highlighted her commitment to preserving one million acres of open space in New Jersey over the next decade and called on New Jersey voters to approve Public Question No. 1, which would dedicated funding to support the Governor's open space preservation plan.

The Governor and Sen. Torricelli were joined at Mason Farm in Flemington by U.S. Representative Michael Pappas for a celebration of the preservation of the 50,000th acre of farmland through New Jersey's innovative farmland preservation program. The trio heralded the importance of preserving open space, farms and parkland for all time, to ensure that future generations share in New Jersey's high quality of life.

"Today I am proud to be preserving open space for our future generations," said Gov. Whitman. "Our Farmland Preservation program is helping to 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," said Gov. Whitman. "By preserving farms like Mason Farm, 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."

The Governor encouraged voters to spread the word about the importance of supporting Public Question No. 1, which will appear on the ballot in next month's election, to ensure a stable funding level -- \$98 million annually -- for open space and farmland preservation and historic preservation projects throughout New Jersey.

"Preservation efforts like the Green Acres and Farmland Preservation programs have already helped us save hundreds of thousands of acres around the state, but we must accelerate our rate of preservation if we are to save our rapidly dwindling open space," Gov. Whitman said.

The Governor said her goal is to preserve one million acres of open space over the next ten years, including 500,000 acres of farmland, 200,000 acres for public recreation, 200,000 acres for greenways along streams and trails, and 100,000 acres for watershed protection.

"Preserving our tax-paying open space and providing and maintaining recreational areas through the Farmland Preservation program help support the foundation of the quality of life we enjoy today and want future generations to be able to enjoy as well," Agriculture Secretary Art Brown said. "Laying the groundwork for such a legacy takes the kind of vision Governor Whitman articulated in her inaugural address last year and the kind of planning that only a stable source of future funding can guarantee."

New Jersey's Farmland Preservation is one of the keys to keeping a thriving agriculture industry in the Garden State. The program has helped preserve 331 farms, covering 50,424 acres across New Jersey. Administered by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), the program is a national model for the preservation of important agricultural land. The program helps counties acquire development easements on farmland by providing grants for a portion of the acquisition cost.

The counties hold title to the development easements while the farmers continue to work the land and pay taxes on the property. The landowners can pass the land on to heirs or sell the property if they wish, but the deed restriction remains on the land, prohibiting its use for anything but agriculture.

During the visit to Mason Farm, Gov. Whitman also took time to highlight her support for Public Question No. 2, a ballot initiative which would enable the Legislature to authorize regulations governing wagers on the results of horse races and gambling at racetracks - supporting the racing and horse farming industries.

"Public Question No. 2 would allow New Jersey racing to be treated equal to the state Lottery and to the racing industries in New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware. This proposal would bring fairness to the industry," said the Governor. "We can't afford to lose the horse racing industry - and the tens of thousands of jobs and acres of farmland sustained by the equine industry."

Joining the Governor in support of Public Question No. 2 were jockey Julie Krone and harness driver and John Campbell.