News from
SALEM COUNTY
Office of Public Information

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SALEM COUNTY CELEBRATES 20,000th ACRE OF PRESERVED FARMLAND

(MANNINGTON, NJ)-- Freeholder Director Lee Ware today welcomed New Jersey Agriculture Secretary Charles Kuperus, State Senator Stephen Sweeney, Assemblyman Douglas Fisher, Salem County Agriculture Development Board members and a crowd consisting of farmers, landowners who have preserved their farms and local officials to the Salem County 20,000 Acres of Farmland Preservation Celebration at the Battiato Farm in Mannington Township. The milestone of 20,000 acres preserved was reached on Friday, March 24th when the Salem County Agriculture Development Board made settlement on the Battiato Farm.

"This is a tremendous day for Salem County as we celebrate a true team success," said Director Ware. "In 2002 the voters of Salem County spoke loud and clear about the importance of Farmland preservation when they approved a two-cent dedicated tax to fund our preservations efforts. With the support of the community, the commitment of the farmers, the efforts of our legislators, and the resolve of the Freeholders we have been able to achieve the milestone of 20,000 acres of preserved farmland, earning us the rank of second in the State of New Jersey. We truly are the garden spot of the garden state."

Salem County Farmland Preservation efforts began in 1990 when the Board of Chosen Freeholders adopted a resolution authorizing the creation of the Agricultural Land Preservation Program. The first farm preserved in Salem County was in 1990 when the County made settlement with the Harris Farm located in Pilesgrove Township. Since the programs inception in 1990, approximately 157 farms have opted to participate in the plan. As of 2002, there were 753 farms in the County of Salem covering 96,238 acres.

"Salem County has a strong and proud agricultural legacy of excellence which will continue in our future as we strive to maintain our rural way of life," said Freeholder Beth Timberman, Master of Ceremonies and Liaison to the Salem County Open Space Committee. "The developers have been trying to get their grip on Salem County and today's celebration sends a message that we are serious about our farmland and we will continue to persevere in the midst of opposition. We will continue to be aggressive in our efforts to preserve our farmland and our farmers."

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Salem County has been working with many organizations to preserve farmland and open space throughout the County. Currently, the County is working with Morris Land Conservancy in developing a county-wide open space plan, which will include a major farmland preservation component. In addition to working with outside agencies to maximize the effectiveness of open space/farmland preservation, the County has also worked closely with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and Third District Legislators in securing funding and guidance for their preservation efforts.

Senator Stephen M. Sweeney and Assemblyman Douglas Fisher presented Freeholder Director Lee Ware and Freeholder Beth Timberman with a Joint Resolution honoring Salem County's commitment to Farmland Preservation. Assemblyman John Burzichelli was unable to attend the celebration due to budget hearings in Trenton.

"This is an outstanding accomplishment, Salem County has a lot to be proud of, this shows what can be done when **S**tate and County governments work together to save this valuable resource for future generations," said State Senator Stephen M. Sweeney. "I recognize the outstanding progress in preserving our endangered farmland and open space; it's an important step in safeguarding our way of life here in southern New Jersey."

"20,000 acres is a lot of land and the Salem County Freeholder Board and this Third District Legislative team worked closely together to make this happen," said Assemblyman John J. Burzichelli. "The residents of Salem County should be very excited that this land, along with future acquisitions, will help keep developers from paving and building over this precious farmland and open space."

"I know that the Salem County governing body has worked very hard to make this goal of 20,000 acres a reality and I know they want to do even more," said Assemblyman Douglas H. Fisher. "It is important that we, as State Legislators, are there to do what we can to make sure that the County receives the state support they need."

The Farmland Celebration began at the Battiato Farm and concluded at the Ware Agricultural Complex with a festive luncheon and special music. Each guest received a special gift box containing various agricultural commodities showcasing Salem County's finest Jersey Fresh vegetables and products.

"This is just the beginning," said Director Lee Ware. "I look forward to the next celebration marking another major milestone in our relentless pursuit to preserve our farmland and open space."

The Farmland Preservation Celebration will be aired on Quinn Broadcasting, Comcast Channel 78, on May 11 from 8:00-9:30 PM and May 19 from 7:00-8:30 PM. For more information about Salem County's Farmland Preservation program, please visit www.salemcountynj.gov.

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