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**Congressman Holt, NJDA Secretary of Agriculture Kuperus
and Conservationists Call for Strong 2007 Farm Bill**

Bill Could Increase Conservation & Bring Meaningful Aid to New Jersey Farmers

FAR HILLS, NJ, April 11, 2007 – Congressman Rush Holt (D-NJ 12th) joined NJDA Secretary of Agriculture Charlie Kuperus, farmers Sherry Dudas and Jim Kinsel and representatives from the New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF), Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association and Environmental Defense today to call for Congress to enact a strong 2007 Farm Bill that would significantly increase funding for conservation programs, ‘healthy’ food initiatives and more marketing opportunities for New Jersey farmers.

"The agricultural community in the Northeast has unique needs," said Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12). "We must ensure that the 2007 Farm Bill addresses priorities for New Jersey like open space preservation, farmland protection and facilitating the production of nutritious produce and the raw materials that can lead to alternative energy."

New legislation - HR 1551, The Healthy Farms, Foods and Fuels Act of 2007, has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate that could greatly improve the Farm Bill. Congressmen Rush Holt (D-NJ 12th), Jim Saxton (R-NJ 3rd), Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ 2nd), Donald Payne (D-NJ-10th), Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ-11th), Rob Andrews (D-NJ-1st), Steven Rothman (D-NJ-9th), Albio Sires (D-NJ-13th), Frank Pallone (D-NJ 6th) and Bill Pascrell (D-NJ 8th) are all co-sponsors of the bill. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced an identical bill in the Senate with support from Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ).

"This new legislation will go a long way towards helping us keep the garden in the Garden State while helping protect clean water and the environment," said Jim Waltman, Executive Director of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association. "The bill would increase funding to address many of our greatest environmental challenges-from sprawl to degraded water quality, and help expand organic farming throughout the country, a direction that will improve American's health."

New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) also strongly supports this legislation, which will help our farmers, consumers and the environment.

"Our Members of Congress are showing strong leadership through support of this important bill," said Michele S. Byers, NJCF Executive Director. "As an original cosponsor of the Healthy Farms Act, Congressman Holt clearly understands the importance of agriculture to our state. He is a champion of organic agriculture, and recently submitted a program request for \$5 million

for transition to organic production and \$1.5 million for organic certification cost share assistance. NJCF wants to preserve farmland and we want to keep farmers farming because sustainable agriculture is vital to New Jersey's future."

NJCF has been working with New Jersey farmers, Environmental Defense, Stony-Brook Millstone Watershed Association, the Wilderness Society and the New Jersey Congressional delegation for a 2007 Farm Bill that emphasizes conservation and nutritional program funding as well as support for environmentally sustainable farms.

"Congress will pass a Farm Bill this year and will be spending about \$100 billion on farms over five years," said Timothy Male, Senior Ecologist at Environmental Defense. "New Jersey farmers have lost out under past farm legislation - most are ineligible for the some of the biggest programs because they grow fruits and vegetables rather than heavily subsidized crops. Legislative proposals like The Healthy Farms Act support programs open to all farmers. If New Jersey Members of Congress continue to support such reforms, your farmers, consumers and the environment are much more likely to benefit from the 2007 Farm Bill."

The 2007 Farm Bill would provide unprecedented resources to help New Jersey protect its farmland, combat sprawl and protect wetlands. The Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program has already helped permanently preserve over 12,000 acres of New Jersey farmland. The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provided nearly \$5.18 million to preserve and restore approximately 2,200 acres of wetlands in the heart of the Pine Barrens on the Franklin Parker Preserve. More funding is warranted because farmer demand for assistance from WRP and all conservation programs in New Jersey far exceeds the annual supply.

"At Honey Brook Organic Farm, we have a strong commitment to conservation of natural resources," said Sherry Dudas, Farm Manager at Honey Brook Organic Farm. "Passage of initiatives like those in the Healthy Farms bill would provide critical assistance to farm managers like us so we may continue to provide sound stewardship of farmland under our care."

Within *The Healthy Farms Act*, a proposed new U.S. Department of Agriculture suburban and community forest protection program would save threatened private forestland in the Highlands, and increased program funding for conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program would help landowners protect natural resources.

The bill includes major new funding to help protect farmland, forests, and environmentally-sensitive lands from sprawl. It allows more than 2.75 million acres of wetlands to be restored and protected around the country and provides \$300 million for the protection of farmland from sprawl and development and \$300 million for the restoration and management of wildlife habitat.

The Healthy Farms Act also helps address the growing demand by American consumers for local and healthy food. Each year, the United States increases its imports of organic products because demand exceeds domestic production. The bill provides more funding to help New Jersey farmers who want to convert to organic production, and thus help reverse the tide driving America to import more and more organic food. It creates new funding to help establish more farmers' markets and expands coupon programs that help low income families and the elderly shop at farmers' markets.

The “farm to cafeteria” program is another innovative program that would provide schoolchildren in New Jersey with greater access to healthy fruits and vegetables, and expand markets for New Jersey farmers.

The Healthy Farms Act also would expand the ability of our farmers to meet America’s energy needs with environmentally-friendly renewable energy. It expands programs so that farmers and farmer-led cooperative efforts have access to grants, loans, and loan guarantees that will allow them to adopt innovative new technologies to create energy from animal waste, develop cellulosic fuel sources, and expand the most environmentally beneficial methods of biofuels production.

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation is a private, non-profit organization. Through acquisition and stewardship, NJCF protects strategic lands; promotes strong land use policies; and forges partnerships to achieve conservation goals. Since 1960, NJCF has protected over 100,000 acres of natural areas and farmland – from the Highlands to the Pine Barrens to the Delaware Bay, from farms to forests to urban and suburban parks. For more information, please contact NJCF at 1-888-LAND-SAVE (1-888-526-3728) or info@njconservation.org.

Honey Brook Organic Farm is one of the oldest operating organic farms in New Jersey. In 1991, farmer Jim Kinsel established Honey Brook Organic Farm's Community Supported Agriculture program. The farm fields are certified organic, which means our fields and growing practices meet strict federal standards and that our farm is inspected and reviewed by an independent organization every year. Visit us at <http://www.honeybrookorganicfarm.com>.

The Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association is a member supported non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of the natural environment in the 265-square mile region drained by Stony Brook and the Millstone River. We are committed to improving community awareness of environmental issues, protecting water quality and quantity, and supporting informed land use decision-making. Learn more about us at <http://www.thewatershed.org>.

Environmental Defense, a leading national nonprofit organization, represents more than 500,000 members. Since 1967, Environmental Defense has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create breakthrough solutions to the most serious environmental problems. Visit our Farm Bill website at <http://environmentaldefense.org/page.cfm?tagID=103>.