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CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION CLOSES DEAL PRESERVING 1,900- ACRE NURSERY PROPERTY

*Landmark effort protects farmland and wildlife habitat in heart of Central
New Jersey*

(12 P/93) TRENTON - The Christie Administration has finalized the preservation of a nearly 1,900-acre nursery property in the heart of central New Jersey as wildlife habitat, preserved farmland, and additions to county parks and greenways along historic Crosswicks Creek, DEP Commissioner Bob Martin and Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher announced today.

The DEP's Green Acres Program, the State Agriculture Development Committee and local funding partners closed the preservation deal with the Flemer family, which until a few years ago operated the property as Princeton Nurseries, one of the nation's largest commercial nurseries. Other partners in this landmark purchase are Monmouth County, Burlington County, the Monmouth County Conservation Foundation and Upper Freehold. D&R Greenway facilitated initial discussions between the state and the Flemer family.

The preservation agreement was reached with three Flemer family businesses - Wm. Flemer's Sons Inc., Crosswicks Farms Inc., and Allentown Tree Farm, known collectively as the Flemer entities.

The \$28 million agreement uses more than \$16.5 million in state, local and nonprofit open space funding sources for the outright purchases of land for a 512-acre state Wildlife Management Area and nearly 500 acres as additions to the Monmouth and Mercer County park systems. The SADC and its county and local partners provided another \$11.4 million to purchase farmland easements on an additional 847 acres.

"Governor Christie is committed to protecting open space and New Jersey's environment," Commissioner Martin said. "Land preservation provides numerous benefits, among them protecting air and water quality and providing habitat for wildlife. This property is truly a beautiful piece of land right in the heart of the most densely populated state in the nation. I commend the Flemer family and all of our partners for having the foresight to recognize its significance and working toward its preservation."

"The preservation of this land was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect 1,900 contiguous acres of valuable farmland and other natural resource lands in central New Jersey," Secretary Fisher said. "This project - one of the largest joint preservation projects in the history of the Farmland Preservation and Green Acres programs - will forever ensure plentiful opportunities for agriculture to grow, and for every generation to enjoy the bounty this land has to offer. It would not have been possible without the Flemer family's commitment to preservation, and the cooperation and support of all the preservation partners."

"Open space trust funds make it possible for important projects like the Flemer project to move forward," Monmouth County Freeholder Lillian G. Burry said. "Cooperation between agencies at the local, county and state levels is necessary for land preservation projects of this magnitude to come to fruition."

"In these times of austere budgets and fiscal constraints, no one entity could have afforded to save this precious natural resource," said Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes. "This effort is an example of how government can work together for a common purpose, and I'm so pleased that Mercer County has played an important role."

"We are grateful to the people of the state of New Jersey for their support of the preservation of precious open space and irreplaceable farmland in our state," the Flemer Family said. "Future generations of farmers and nature lovers will together enjoy these beautiful lands that have meant so much to the William Flemer and John Flemer families."

More than 1,000 acres will be preserved as open space through the creation of a 512-acre State Wildlife Management Area and nearly 500 acres of additions to the adjacent to Monmouth County Park System's Crosswicks Creek Greenway and the Mercer County Park Commission's Crosswicks Creek Greenway corridor.

The portions of the land that will become a Wildlife Management Area and additions to the Crosswicks Creek Greenway will not be available for public use for up to one year (with an additional one-year extension, if necessary) to allow the Flemer family to remove existing nursery stock and restore the land consistent with recreational uses and wildlife needs. The goal of the DEP and the family, however, is to complete restoration and open the land for public use by spring 2013.

Another 847 acres is preserved through acquisitions of development rights on farmland. When landowners sell development rights, or a farmland easement, they continue to own the land but agree to deed restrictions that keep the land permanently available for agriculture uses.

The rolling landscape, situated where Monmouth, Mercer and Burlington counties meet, will help connect thousands of acres of existing county park lands and greenways along Crosswicks Creek, an area rich in outdoors recreation opportunities as well as the history of the Revolutionary War.

The portion of the land being preserved as a state Wildlife Management Area and as additions to county park lands consists of grasslands, mature forests and forested wetland that will provide a great diversity of wildlife habitat and will offer recreational opportunities for those who enjoy hiking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting and being in the outdoors. Some nursery roads will be developed into a trail system for hiking, bicycle riding and horseback riding.

The farmland portion will be a major addition to the permanent agricultural land base in an area where approximately 15,000 acres of farmland are preserved.

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