

June 12, 2006

Bruce Knight, Chief  
USDA, NRCS, Office of the Chief  
Room 5105-A  
14<sup>th</sup> and Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Knight:

The member states of the Northeastern Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NEASDA) have long been leaders in the effort to permanently protect valuable farmland. Since the late 1970s, our ten states have collectively invested \$1.4 billion dollars to protect over 765,000 acres of productive farmland in the region. This commitment of resources is 70% of all the dollars spent to date by state farm and ranch land protection programs across the country and accounts for more than 50% of the acres of farm and ranch lands protected nationwide through these programs. Since the creation of the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), we have welcomed the federal government as a partner in this effort.

In June of 2004, the NEASDA members wrote to you to express a collective concern regarding implementation of the FRPP. In response to burdensome guidelines and policies developed by NRCS that threatened the effectiveness of the program and conflicted with longstanding state program rules and procedures, NEASDA recommended that you consider certifying existing state farmland protection programs that meet a requisite standard of farmland protection experience and defer to those certified states' expertise regarding appropriate rules and requirements for FRPP administration.

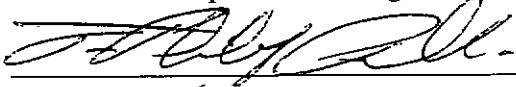
Recent decisions by NRCS have only exacerbated the problem. In particular, the FY 2006 Announcement of Program Funding has imposed significant new requirements on all program applicants, creating additional administrative and financial burdens on our state programs and causing a drop in FRPP applications in several of our states. We are extremely concerned about the cumulative effect of these burgeoning FRPP requirements on the viability and effectiveness of our state programs, and believe these requirements are completely unnecessary for established programs with a demonstrated track record in farmland protection. For this reason, we urge you again to certify experienced and qualified state farmland protection programs and to defer to their administrative and legal expertise to manage the contribution of FRPP to their efforts to protect working lands for the future.

In the Northeast, the everyday loss of high-quality farmland to development fundamentally affects the future of our agricultural industry. Our state farmland protection programs reflect a public commitment to a future for farming, and we would like to consider USDA an important

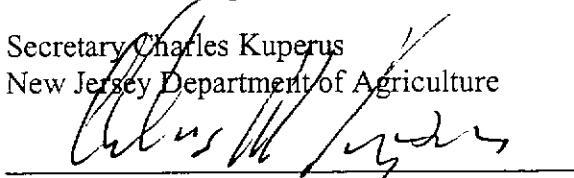
ally in this commitment. We urge you to take steps to address our concerns as soon as possible, and we are available to discuss the concept of a certification program with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Commissioner F. Philip Prelli  
Connecticut Department of Agriculture



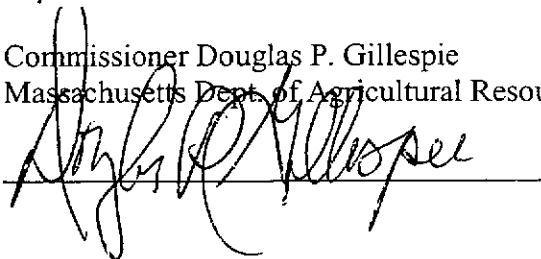
Secretary Charles Kuperus  
New Jersey Department of Agriculture



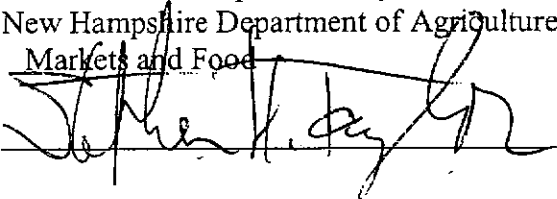
Commissioner Patrick H. Brennan  
New York State Department of Agriculture  
and Markets



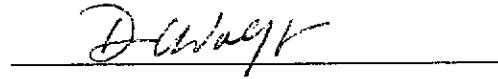
Commissioner Douglas P. Gillespie  
Massachusetts Dept. of Agricultural Resources



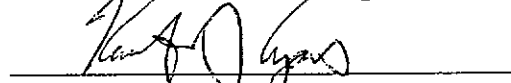
Commissioner Stephen H. Taylor  
New Hampshire Department of Agriculture,  
Markets and Food



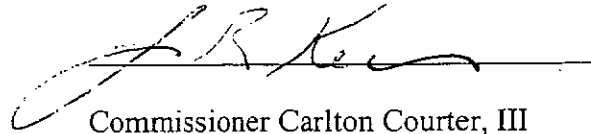
Secretary Dennis C Wolff  
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture



Chief Kenneth Ayars  
Rhode Island Division of Agriculture



Secretary Steve Ken  
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food  
and Markets



Commissioner Carlton Courter, III  
Virginia Department of Agriculture and  
Consumer Services

