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Historic Carpenter Farm and Sparks Farm Preserved! 322 Additional Acres of Permanently Protected Farmland for Mannington Township

Mannington, NJ – September 3, 2009: Linda J. Mead, executive director of D&R Greenway Land Trust joined Agriculture Secretary Douglas H. Fisher today in announcing the preservation of the 180-acre Carpenter Farm and the 142-acre Sparks Farm.

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) provided D&R Greenway with grants to purchase the development rights on the two farms. The SADC's funding came from the Garden State Preservation Trust and the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The preservation of the Carpenter and Sparks farms follows the preservation of the 1,931-acre Seabrook Farms in 2008 – a cooperative project funded by the SADC, Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, Salem County and Mannington Township. D&R Greenway acted as advisor to the Seabrook family throughout this project.

The Carpenter Farm is owned by Samuel Preston Carpenter and his wife Molly. The land was purchased over 300 years ago by Samuel Carpenter, a Deputy Governor of colonial Pennsylvania and friend to Governor William Penn. Preston farms his family's multi-generational land, growing a range of rotated crops including vegetables, wheat and soybeans.

Three-quarters of a mile away is **the Sparks Farm** protected by Mildred Sparks. Former Township Committeeman George Wright, father of Mannington Township Deputy Mayor Joanne Wright farmed the Sparks land. Wheat and soybeans are the primary crops cultivated on the Sparks Farm.

"We were pleased to fund the preservation of these two farms, which builds on the substantial investment already made in protecting important farmland, other unique resources and the rural character of Salem County," said Secretary Douglas H. Fisher, chair of the State Agriculture Development Committee that administers the Farmland Preservation Program. "With each farm we preserve, we are protecting the best of the Garden State and helping ensure our children and grandchildren will be able to appreciate all agriculture has to offer for years to come."

Environmental as well as Agricultural Importance

In addition to protecting rich, fertile farmland and investing in the agricultural economy of the region, preserving these lands also provides a significant environmental benefit. The Carpenter and Sparks Farms (as well as the Seabrook Farm) border the 18,593-acre area known as Mannington Meadows.

Originally, Dutch settlers constructed dikes around Mannington Meadows to farm salt hay and wild rice. A hurricane in the 1920s destroyed most of the impoundments, which were never rebuilt. The resulting land and waterscape is one of the top areas in the state for waterfowl diversity and has been designated an Important Bird Area by NJ Audubon. Mannington Meadows provides critical habitat for breeding populations of imperiled species such as: bald eagle, pied-billed grebe, king rail, Caspian tern, sora and clapper rail.

D&R Greenway Executive Director Linda J. Mead commented, “Preserving both the agricultural heritage and environmental integrity of this region is critical to the future of South Jersey a priority for D&R Greenway. Mannington Township officials invited D&R Greenway into the community and asked us to lend our 20 years of expertise to help preserve farms and other lands. We are grateful to The William Penn Foundation who provided operational funding to support our work in this region where there is so much opportunity for preservation. Projects like the permanent protection of the Sparks, Carpenter and Seabrook Farms provide a ‘win-win’ solution for both the landowners and the citizens of Mannington Township.”

Keep It Green

The Garden State Preservation Trust, which has funded New Jersey’s farmland, open space and historic preservation efforts since 1999, ran dry in 2007. And while a stopgap \$200 million bond issue was passed by New Jersey voters in 2007, now, two years later, the Trust is again out of funds.

There is a question on the November 2009 ballot for a \$400 million bonding authorization to continue New Jersey’s investment in preserving working farmlands, open space, historic treasures and water quality, lakes and streams. Without an infusion of new funds, preservation at all levels in New Jersey will be severely hampered.

The proposed bond measure will cost \$10 annually per household, or less than \$1 per month.

According to Linda Mead, “Passage of the ballot question will provide the funding that D&R Greenway and the state need to achieve preservation successes like the permanent protection of the Sparks, Carpenter and Seabrook Farms.”

D&R Greenway Land Trust urges the voters of New Jersey to vote “yes” on the **Green Acres, Water Supply and Floodplain Protection and Farmland and Historic Preservation Bond Act of 2009**. For more information, please visit www.NJKeepItGreen.org.

About the State Agriculture Development Committee

The State Agriculture Development Committee administers New Jersey’s Farmland Preservation Program. To date, more than 26,000 acres of farmland have been preserved in Salem County under the program.

About D&R Greenway Land Trust

Founded in 1989, D&R Greenway land Trust is one of New Jersey’s leading non-profit land preservation organizations. Their mission is to preserve and care for natural and agricultural lands and historic landscapes in central New Jersey for the public’s benefit, and to lend our expertise to advance land preservation in other parts of the State. We strive to establish interconnected greenways and inspire a conservation ethic by connecting people with the land.