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For Immediate Release
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**Farmland Preservation Theme at This Year's Big-E
(Governor Rowland to Salute Farmland Preservation Efforts)**

Whatever befalls the earth
Befalls the sons of the earth.
Man did not weave the web of life;
He is merely a strand on it.
Whatever he does to the web,
He does to himself.
Chief Seattle

Hartford, Conn. -- Chief Seattle delivered this warning over one hundred years ago. The Connecticut Trustees of the Eastern State Exposition Eastern (Big E), concerned about the depletion of Connecticut's own natural resources, believe there are many ways to protect the state's environment. In an effort to increase public awareness and involvement by policy makers on farmland preservation, the Trustees are providing a booth at this year's Big E in West Springfield, Massachusetts. The display is designed to promote the preservation of Connecticut's farmlands and acknowledge those who go above and beyond to help preserve Connecticut's landscape.

For seventeen days beginning on Friday, September 12, the booth will showcase an interactive display and media presentation in the Connecticut Building, providing information on how and why anyone can, and should help preserve farmland in Connecticut. The display will emphasize "Ten Reasons We Love Our Farms."

"The Big E is a celebration of our New England agricultural heritage," said Kip Kolesinkas, state soil scientist, USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service. "A Connecticut without agriculture just wouldn't feel like home. The farmland preservation display at the Big E will help inform our citizens about the loss of farms and yet provides hope that as individuals they can make a difference." A video, developed with assistance from Eastern Connecticut State University, will give visitors a look at why farmland preservation is imperative. The booth also will also have a fundraiser for the Connecticut Farmland Trust, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the state's remaining farmland for agricultural use by current and future farmers.

In addition to the booth, the Trustees have developed the "Pathfinder in Farmland Preservation Awards" to recognize innovative farmland preservation efforts in Connecticut on the public, private and educational Sector. Governor Rowland will present the awards on behalf of the Trustees during "Connecticut Day" on Wednesday, September 17.

"The Trustees chose to recognize those who were leading the way in Connecticut efforts to preserve farmland. Clearly, the winners are excellent examples of innovative leadership," said Mark Winne, Executive Director of the Hartford Food System.

The **public sector winner of the Farmland Preservation Pathfinder Award is the Town of Suffield and its town planner Phil Chester.** Suffield town staff and officials have engaged in numerous farmland preservation efforts including, identifying farmland as a key natural, cultural and economic resource; negotiating for the purchase of agricultural easements on behalf of the Town with over a dozen families; collaborating with the State Farmland Protection Program to purchase the development rights to two active farms in 2002; and submitting an application to the Federal Farmland Preservation Program for the 2003 funding round.

"In a time of subdivision explosion in the Greater Hartford Area, the Town of Suffield has made a solid financial, philosophical, and administrative commitment to community heritage and local economics through farmland preservation," said John Guskowski, community development planner for the Capitol Region Council of Governments. "I have no doubt that the farmland preservation efforts of Suffield are easily the strongest in the Capitol Region, if not the entire state"

The winners for the private sector are **Robin Chesmer of Graywall Farm in Lebanon, and Terry Jones of Jones Family Farm in Shelton;** each will receive a \$500 donation. Chesmer is owner of the Graywall Farm in Connecticut, a farm with 580 head of Holsteins (300 milking) and a few Brown Swiss. The farm is a Connecticut Dairy Farm of Distinction. Chesmer has given talks around the state about farmland preservation. His presentation, call "The Dirty Truth," focuses on saving dirt, soil and land. He provides regular testimony at state and local public hearings on farmland preservation policy. He is the founding member of Working Lands Alliance, a multi-interest coalition committed to increasing the state's focus on farmland preservation.

"Robin not only farms for his family and him, he also farms for the community. He understands the impact his farm has, and the decisions he makes are always made with the greater community in mind," said Bonnie Burr, director of government relations for the CT Farm Bureau.

The nationally known Jones Family Farm features cut-your-own Christmas Trees, pick-your-own-strawberries, blueberries, and pumpkins. Terry and his wife Jean committed their own land to the state farmland protections program, including a generous bargain sale of the farm's development rights to the state. Terry spearheaded a successful effort to create a municipal farmland protection program in the Town of Shelton. The Jones hosted the first "Annual Celebration of Connecticut Farms" in 2000, a fundraiser that ultimately led to the creation of the Connecticut Farmland Trust. Cris Coffin, the New England Policy Manager of the American Farmland Trust said of Terry Jones, "There are few more avid, effective and articulate advocates

for farmland protection in Connecticut than the members of the Jones family of Shelton."

The winners of the education sector award are members of the Envirothon committee. The Envirothon is an environmental educational program for high school students which last year had over 2000 participants. Student teams train during the school year to participate in an all-day field exercise this past April that included written and oral exams in the fields of aquatics, forestry, wildlife, soils, and a current issue that changes each year. In 2003 the Envirothon program used farmland preservation as the subject for the oral component of the competition. **The winning team for 2003 was the Norwich Free Academy.** \$1,000 will be donated to the Envirothon Committee to be used for scholarships.

"The Envirothon program has been nationally recognized as the premiere environmental education program for high school students and we welcomed the opportunity to include farmland preservation in the Envirothon curriculum for 2003," said Jeffrey Folger, chairman of Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation.

For more information on the Big E booth or the Pathfinder Awards, please contact Jennifer Martin, Food Policy Director for the Hartford Food System at (860) 296-9325 or by E-mail at info@workinglandsalliance.org