



News From NJ Senate Democrats

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CONTACT: Cara Noel
Tel: (609) 292-5215
Fax: (609) 633-7254

SENATOR SMITH MOVES TO SAVE FARMS

TRENTON - A bill sponsored by Senator Bob Smith to help save New Jersey farms by allowing farmers to start limited non-agricultural businesses on preserved farmland was endorsed today by the Senate Economic Growth Committee.

“This legislation would help farmers survive financially in a tough economic climate,” said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex. “By allowing limited non-agricultural commercial activities on preserved farmland, this bill would help farmers stay in the business of farming.”

In the year 2003, seventy percent of the state’s 9,900 farms had sales less than \$10,000.

Senator Smith’s bill, S-206, would authorize the State Agriculture Development Committee to issue a special permit to a farm owner enrolled in the State’s farmland preservation program to conduct a separate business, and under limited circumstances would allow for structural improvements, which would be subject to zoning laws.

“Fifty percent of the state’s farmers have to work a second job, to supplement their income,” said Senator Smith. “The reality of farm life today is that supplemental income is often necessary for economic survival.”

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The bill would balance the interests of New Jerseyans who want to preserve the natural state of the environment with those concerned about sustaining the state’s agricultural industry by establishing guidelines that no harm

could be done to the soil, water, air, or other natural resources.

The State Agriculture Development Committee, which currently provides grants to counties, municipalities and non-profit groups to fund the purchase of development easements on farms, would administer the Farmland Preservation Program.

The permits would be issued for a period of up to 20 years and would be granted for one non-agricultural activity only. Additionally, the farm must be a working commercial enterprise. The \$1,000 permit application fee would be dedicated for use for farmland preservation purposes.

The measure now awaits consideration by the full Senate.

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