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**Agriculture Commissioner Initiates Recovery Fund
Helping Farmers Rehabilitate Damaged Farmland**

New York State Agriculture Commissioner Darrel J. Aubertine today enlisted the assistance of Soil and Water Conservation Districts to begin assessing damage in agricultural disaster areas and to begin identifying projects to restore farms and farmland. Initiating the Governor's \$15 million Agricultural and Community Recovery Fund (ACRF), the first allocation of \$5 million, the conservation component, will provide funding for farmers to restore farmland damaged by Hurricane Irene and prevent further damage in the future.

The Governor's ACRF will also include three other components:

1. Farm Operations Match Program: This will match farmers' dollars for the purchase of feed for animals and produce from other New York producers to allow the farms operations to continue;
2. On Farm Capital Needs Program: This will provide grants and deferred and low/interest loans to meet the immediate and long-term needs of farmers devastated by Hurricane Irene; and
3. Main Street Business Assistance Program: This will provide a combination of grants and low interest loans to help Main Street Businesses get back in operation in eligible counties.

"The land is a farmer's greatest resource. The conservation component released today will help farmers who have had their land devastated by Hurricane Irene recover," said Darrel J. Aubertine, Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets.

The Conservation Program will be administered by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets in consultation with the New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee. Applications for funding will be accepted from County Soil and Water Conservation Districts within the eligible counties.

The Soil and Water Districts will determine land eligibility based on site inspections of damage. For land to be eligible, the Hurricane must have created a new conservation problem that, if left untreated, would: degrade the State's natural resources; impact public drinking water supplies, present ongoing pollution risks to surface and groundwater; pose threats to production facilities, impair farm safety; affect the land's productive capacity; or present challenges to farm production that are too costly to implement without state assistance.

Farmers in eligible counties should contact their local Soil and Water District. A list of county offices can be found here: http://www.nys-soilandwater.org/contacts/county_offices.html.

Eligible emergency conservation practices include, but are not limited to: debris removal; restoring fences and conservation structures; crop removal; land shaping and grading; and installation of vegetative practice including cover crop.

Eligible costs include: architectural and/or engineering services; consultant services; construction and other direct expenses related to implementation.

Project selection will be based on identified need, degree of loss and in consideration of the available funding for eligible counties. Recovery funds requested will be reviewed and approved by the Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets. The Commissioner may consult with the State Soil and Water Conservation Committee, the agency that oversees policy and programs for New York's 58 County Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Project sponsors within eligible counties may submit applications on a weekly basis. Applications will be taken until all available funds are awarded.