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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nearly 200 Vie for Limited Farmland Preservation Funds *Ohio Agriculture Department Begins Application Review Process*

REYNOLDSBURG, Ohio (June 4, 2008) – Ohio farm families and local communities recently submitted applications to Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) Director Robert Boggs requesting funds to help keep their land forever in agricultural use. The department has received applications from 198 families for the seventh and final round of funding from the Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP).

“Farmland preservation is at the heart of our efforts to maintain the foundation upon which our state was built,” said Boggs. “Viable farmland provides us food, jobs, and a way to make Ohio an industry leader in sustainable agriculture. The Clean Ohio AEPP funds allow us to preserve this valued resource for generations to come.”

An agricultural easement is a voluntary, legal agreement in which a landowner agrees to use the land only for agricultural purposes and permanently relinquishes the right to develop the land for non-agricultural activities. The landowner retains ownership and management of the land with a governmental entity or non-profit organization "holding" the easement, which grants them the legal right to enforce the agreement. The agricultural easement is a permanent and legally binding restriction upon the land, which does not affect the rights to sell or pass along the land.

AEPP applications were received from families in the following 30 Ohio counties: Ashland (26), Ashtabula (1), Butler (8), Champaign (9), Clark (14), Clinton (2), Fairfield (13), Fulton (11), Greene (4), Holmes (2), Knox (18), Lake (2), Logan (3), Lucas (1), Madison (5), Marion (5), Miami (13), Montgomery (2), Morrow (2), Perry (4), Pickaway (1), Portage (10), Preble (16), Seneca (10), Trumbull (2), Union (2), Warren (2), Wayne (2), Williams (1), and Wood (7).

The AEPP applications are currently undergoing the first of a two-step scoring process. The first step uses a formula that takes into account soil quality, proximity to other protected areas, proximity to intermediate development pressure, the use of best management practices, and local support and planning for agriculture. The second step includes a review by the Ohio Agriculture Director's 12-member Farmland Preservation Advisory Board. The advisory board evaluates a set of questions designed to provide further insight into the farm's operations, the farm's estate, business and conservation plans, local agricultural infrastructure, and local farmland protection efforts. Scores from both rounds are combined, and the advisory board presents its recommendations to Director Boggs. Recipients are expected to be announced in mid-July, with more than \$3.1 million in Clean Ohio funds to be distributed.

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Since the AEPP's inception in 2002, the department's Farmland Preservation office has received more than 1,800 Clean Ohio AEPP applications. Due to limited funding, ODA has been able to preserve only 117 of those farms, totaling 23,615 acres. Following this year's round of funding, the \$25 million allocation from the Clean Ohio Fund will be depleted. Governor Strickland's Building Ohio Jobs proposal, a \$1.57 billion investment in Ohio's economy and infrastructure that will create tens of thousands of new jobs, includes a \$400-million bond renewal for the Clean Ohio Fund. If passed, this money will not only help preserve farmland, but will also preserve greenspace, develop recreational trails, and clean up brownfield sites.

For more information on Clean Ohio or the AEPP, visit the department's Web site at www.ohioagriculture.gov/farmland or contact the Office of Farmland Preservation at 614-728-6210.

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