

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

# Small Acreage Farm & Ranch

## Best Management Practices for *Protecting Florida's Water*





## **Do You Own a Small Acreage Farm or Ranch?**

Most small acreage farms or ranches (often called ranchettes or farmettes) are rural properties, usually under 10 acres, where part of the land is used for agricultural purposes, including crops, livestock and horses.

For example, if your home is on several acres and you also have a horse on the land, your property could be considered a ranchette or farmette.



## **Your Role in Protecting Water Resources**

As a ranchette or farmette owner, you play a significant role in protecting Florida's water resources. Some common land-use practices can potentially degrade these resources.

For example, improper irrigation techniques not only place stress on water supplies, but can also damage your property and your neighbor's property by causing erosion, flooding, etc. Storm water or irrigation water that runs off your land may carry pollutants from manure, fertilizer and pesticides into local water bodies. Uncontrolled animal access to water bodies can introduce harmful animal waste into the water supply.

# Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Ranchettes and Farmettes

BMPs are tested methods, measures or practices designed to prevent or reduce harm to the environment. The BMPs listed in this brochure are practical and cost-effective ways to minimize pollutants entering water bodies, while also improving your land.



## How Can BMPs Help You and Help Protect Florida's Water Resources?

- Improve crop/animal health
- Maintain better pastures
- Protect your land from soil erosion
- Manage weeds and control mud
- Increase property values
- Protect you from related code enforcement problems
- Reduce irrigation, fertilizer and herbicide costs
- Contribute to the improvement of Florida's water quality
- Contribute to the improvement of Florida's groundwater and surface water levels

## **Irrigation BMPs**

- Wells used for irrigation should be constructed by a licensed driller
- Schedule irrigations according to soil moisture and crop water needs
- Adjust irrigation amounts to meet varying crop demands at different growth stages
- Apply irrigation uniformly and accurately; do not overspray onto impermeable surfaces



## **Fertilization BMPs**

- Test soil to determine exact fertilizer needs
- Properly calibrate fertilizer application spreaders
- Apply fertilizer directly over root zone; for row crops, place fertilizer on top of beds; for pasture or field crops, fertilize the entire planted area
- Avoid applying fertilizer near roadways or water bodies
- Minimize overlapping fertilizer during application

## Pasture BMPs

- Do not overstock your land with more animals than it can handle — follow the recommendations and guidelines of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
- Use high-intensity, short-duration grazing to rejuvenate poor pasture
- Allow grass to reach 6 inches before grazing; remove animals when 3 inches remain
- Mow regularly to encourage grass and discourage weeds
- If available, fertilize pastures according to site-specific soil test recommendations or the guidelines of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences



## Fencing BMPs

- Fence off or limit animal access to natural water bodies
- If needed, pipe water from streams or lakes to a trough located away from the water body
- Fence off animal access to areas that receive periodic standing water
- Use fences to divide pastures into temporary plots for rotational grazing





## **Stormwater BMPs**

- Maintain vegetation buffers around animal confinement areas
- Locate animal confinement areas away from water bodies
- Divert uncontaminated surface and roof runoff away from animal facilities
- Construct berms to retain storm water on your land
- Maintain existing slopes away from canals and roadways
- Create drainage ditches to channel water away from water bodies and roadways and into a water retention area
- Direct storm water away from wellhead
- Ensure standing water does not pool around wellhead

## **Erosion Prevention BMPs**

- Allow vegetative buffer strips to grow along water bodies
- Do not leave bare soil exposed to the effects of erosion
- Prevent overgrazing by confining animals for a portion of the day or using rotational grazing

## Drainage BMPs

- Keep pasture and constructed ponds separate from natural water bodies
- Do not create drainage links between constructed ponds and nearby water bodies



## Pasture Weed Control BMPs

- Frequently search for weeds
- If weeds are discovered, either pull them or use a herbicide recommended by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences for the specific weeds
- Buy only hay that is free of weed seeds
- Plant only certified grass seed
- Mow weeds regularly before they go to seed
- Wash your vehicle after being in a weed-infested area
- If using herbicides, avoid spraying on windy days and near water bodies
- Do not spray herbicides immediately before, during or immediately after a rainfall





## Manure BMPs

- Store manure in covered areas protected from weather
- Do not allow excess manure to accumulate in animal confinement areas
- Do not accumulate or store manure in low-lying areas where water collects
- Drag pastures as needed to aerate manure and soil using the recommended rates of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
- Spread manure at allowable rates using a spreader designed for the purpose
- Do not spread manure within 10 feet of canals or roadways
- Compost your manure to improve the fertilizer value
- For excess manure, use a manure pickup service or arrange times for gardeners or nurseries to collect composted manure
- Maintain a good deworming program for animals



## **Mud Prevention BMPs**

- Maintain a grass strip around animal confinement areas
- Use suitable foot material (such as paving stones or rocks) in high-traffic areas
- Install gutters and downspouts on all buildings and divert them away from animal confinement areas

## **Septic Systems**

Properly maintained septic systems help protect the environment by reducing pollution. As a homeowner, you are responsible for maintaining your septic system. You should have your septic system inspected every two to three years and pumped as needed. For more information on proper septic system maintenance, visit [WaterMatters.org/publications](http://WaterMatters.org/publications) to read the brochure entitled “Your Septic System Is Your Responsibility.”

## **Florida-Friendly Landscaping**

In addition to following these BMPs for your pasture and/or farmland, remember that a properly maintained Florida-friendly yard can help you conserve water and reduce pollution of water resources. For more information on Florida-friendly landscaping, contact your local county Extension office (telephone numbers on next page) or visit [WaterMatters.org/yards/](http://WaterMatters.org/yards/).

## Need More Information?

For additional information on ranchette and farmette BMPs and Florida-friendly landscaping, visit the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension web site at *extension.ifas.ufl.edu/* or contact your county Extension office at:

**CHARLOTTE:** (941) 764-4340

**CITRUS:** (352) 527-5700

**DESOTO:** (863) 993-4846

**HARDEE:** (863) 773-2164

**HERNANDO:** (352) 754-4433

**HIGHLANDS:** (863) 402-6540

**HILLSBOROUGH:** (813) 744-5519

**LAKE:** (352) 343-4101

**LEVY:** (352) 486-5131

**MANATEE:** (941) 722-4524

**MARION:** (352) 620-3440

**PASCO:** (352) 521-4288

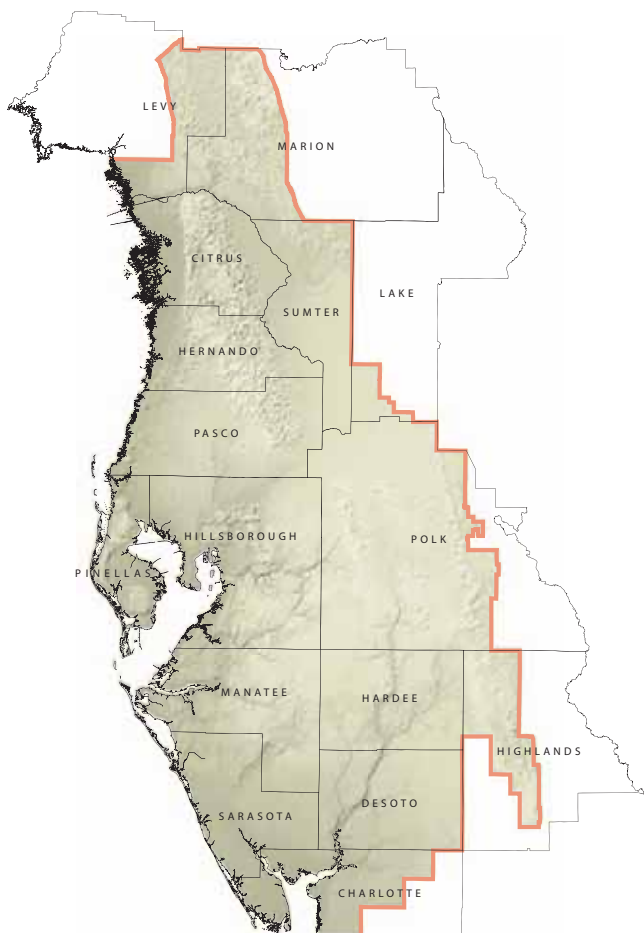
**PINELLAS:** (727) 582-2100

**POLK:** (863) 519-8677

**SARASOTA:** (941) 861-5000

**SUMTER:** (352) 793-2728

For technical assistance on implementing ranchette and farmette BMPs, contact the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service at (352) 338-9500, or visit their web site at *www.fl.nrcs.usda.gov/*.



Southwest Florida  
*Water Management District*

WATERMATTERS.ORG · 1-800-423-1476

For a variety of free publications about protecting  
Florida's water resources, call 1-800-423-1476, ext. 4757,  
or visit [WaterMatters.org/publications/](http://WaterMatters.org/publications/).

This information will be made available in accessible formats upon request.  
Please contact the Communications Department at (352) 796-7211 or  
1-800-423-1476 (FL only), ext. 4757; TDD only at 1-800-231-6103 (FL only).