



**AGRICULTURAL AND GREEN INDUSTRY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2025 – 10:00 AM**

MINUTES

Committee Members Present

Dennis Carlton, Jr., FL Cattlemen's Association
Michael Matteson, FL Citrus Mutual
Curt Williams, FL Farm Bureau Federation
John Vogel, FL Forestry Association
Alan Jones, FL Fruit & Vegetable Association
Andy Neiswender, FL Golf Course Superintendent's Assoc.
Sal Chillura, FL Nursery, Growers & Landscape Assoc.
Kenneth Parker, FL Strawberry Growers Assoc. (alt)
Simon Bollin, Hillsborough County Extension Service
Shawn Steed, Hillsborough County Extension Service (alt)
Joe Walsh, Hillsborough Soil & Water Conservation Dist.
Brandon Sites, On Top of the World Utilities (alt)
Travis Council, Turfgrass Producers of FL
Don Rainey, University of Florida/IFAS

Board Administrative Support

Virginia Singer
Barbara Matrone

Governing Board Liaison

Dustin Rowland

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The Agricultural and Green Industry Advisory Committee (AGIAC) of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) met for its regular meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, December 2, 2025.

Chair Alan Jones called the meeting to order, and attendance was called.

Governing Board Liaison Dustin Rowland welcomed the committee.

2. Additions and Deletions to the Agenda

None.

3. Approval of the September 9, 2025 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the September 9, 2025 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Hydrologic Conditions Update

Mr. Joey Fogel, Staff Hydrologic Data Analyst, provided a hydrologic conditions update. He noted that November is the second month of the District's eight-month dry season. October rainfall was below average, and conditions have remained relatively dry since Hurricane Milton in October 2024. This year also marked the first time in a decade that no hurricanes made landfall within the District, contributing to the ongoing dry conditions. The District received 1.6 inches of rainfall in October, which is a 1.4-inch deficit for the month from the historic 3.0-inch average.

The 12-month rainfall distribution from November 2024 to October 2025 averaged 39.7 inches, which is a 13.0-inch deficit from the historic 52.7-inch average. A graph of the 12-month rainfall departure from average showed multiple 12-month periods of surplus or deficit rainfall since 1998. The 12-month period ending October 2025 showed a 13.0-inch deficit. Prior to that in October 2024, the District had a 9.5-inch surplus. Looking at provisional data for the month of November, the District received less than average rainfall. The historic average is 1.9 inches, but this year only reached 0.2 inches, which was a 1.7-inch rainfall deficit.

Mr. Fogel then discussed recent groundwater levels in the northern, central and southern counties, as well as surface water levels in the Northern Lakes, Tampa Bay Lakes, Polk Upland Lakes and Lake Wales Ridge Lakes regions. He showed another set of graphs and discussed the eight-week mean discharge of the Withlacoochee, Hillsborough, Alafia and Peace rivers. He also discussed public supply volumes for the Peace River Manasota Regional Water Supply and the Tampa Bay area.

Mr. Fogel discussed the Near-Term Climate Forecast and showed seasonal outlooks for temperature and precipitation for December 2025 to February 2026. The Climate Prediction Center is predicting a 40 – 50 percent chance of above normal temperatures and 33 – 50 percent chance of below normal seasonal precipitation for the three-month period. For the extended climate forecast, the La Niña is transitioning to neutral through the January – March period and transitioning to equal chances of rainfall with above normal chances of rainfall in the spring.

Mr. Curt Williams asked Mr. Fogel to review the Phase 1 water restrictions for both landscape and agricultural uses. Mr. Fogel explained that Phase 1 does not impose any formal restrictions on agriculture. Instead, it involves monitoring local conditions, reminding the public to conserve water and limit waste, with current guidance allowing twice-a-week watering in many locations, but local restrictions apply.

6. Mini-FARMS Program Status Update

Mr. Matt Vinzant, FARMS Project Manager, provided an update on the Mini-FARMS Program. The program is designed to incentivize growers to implement low-cost projects that reduce groundwater withdrawals from the Upper Floridan Aquifer. Mini-FARMS operates as a cost-share reimbursement program, offering a 75 percent reimbursement up to a maximum of \$10,000 for approved water quantity and water quality best management practices (BMPs).

Eligible conservation BMPs include soil-moisture probes, weather stations, pump station and zone automation, irrigation conversions from high-volume to low-volume systems, and flow meters when not otherwise required by a water use permit. The program also supports alternative water supply projects, with eligible components such as surface water pumping stations, culverts and riser board structures, surface water filtration and sterilization systems, and surface water pump automation. Water quality BMPs may include soil-moisture probes and fertigation systems, which help reduce nitrogen leaching into groundwater by applying fertilizer gradually to maintain nutrients within the plant root zone.

To qualify for Mini-FARMS cost-share funding, a project must be located within the District, be in regulatory compliance with its water use permit, be a bona fide agricultural operation and be enrolled in the Florida Agricultural BMP Program.

Mr. Vinzant provided an overview of the application process and highlighted several recent projects, noting how the program has evolved and expanded since 2017.

He concluded by reporting that, to date in 2025, the District has received 21 Mini-FARMS applications – six for automation, two for irrigation conversions, seven for soil moisture probes, two for weather stations and four for fertigation systems.

Mr. Joe Walsh asked whether any program participants might be willing to provide testimonials. Mr. Vinzant responded that he could likely identify a list of satisfied users who would be interested in doing so.

7. Timber Management Program

Mr. Allen Milligan, Land Resources Project Manager, provided an overview of the District's timber management program. Chapter 373, Florida Statutes, directs that lands owned by the water management districts be managed and maintained, to the extent practicable, in a manner that balances public access and recreation, and the restoration and protection of their natural conditions. Accordingly, Governing Board policy and Executive Director procedures guide the use and management of District lands in accordance with Florida Statute requirements.

District procedures require the development of land management plans for each property. These plans outline the appropriate uses of the property, define overall management strategy, and establish specific goals and objectives for the ten-year planning period.

The District's land management consists of five primary programs: fire management, timber management, natural systems restoration, invasive species management and public access and recreation. Together, these activities support the District's Strategic Plan, including the Conservation, Restoration and Management Strategic Initiative and broader conservation and restoration goals. Land management is recognized as one of the District's core business processes.

The objectives of the timber management program are to manage forest resources to maintain ecosystem health, increase resiliency, enhance and restore natural systems and reduce hazardous fuels. These activities also generate revenue that helps offset management costs and contributes directly to local economies.

Mr. Milligan then discussed timber stand improvement harvests and the goal of improving forest health, encouraging natural regeneration, reducing density and helping improve the native understory and ground cover. He also reviewed salvage harvests, which address wind damage from hurricanes and impacts from wildfires, and he highlighted the District's planting and reforestation efforts aimed at supporting natural regeneration and maintaining appropriate fire maintenance.

He concluded by discussing the significance of the timber industry, stating that it remains the leading agricultural commodity in the state of Florida.

A question was asked about whether access to District land for beekeepers fell under the District's jurisdiction. Mr. Milligan responded that the Land Resources Bureau did handle these requests and licenses are available.

Mr. Walsh inquired about the fate of a retired timber zone. Mr. Milligan explained that the goal for the area is to regenerate into a naturally occurring native stand. Mr. Walsh also asked if there were lessons learned from one planning period to the next. Mr. Milligan confirmed that they are consistently applying insights from past experiences for future planning.

8. Development of Agenda Topics

Mr. Walsh mentioned that he shared a link to their Strategic Plan in the chat and invited committee members to review it and provide feedback. Chair Jones requested a presentation outlining the land conservation objectives and wildlife corridors within District boundaries. Mr. Simon Bollin requested an update on municipal status and land usage in the District compared with five years ago. Chair Jones also mentioned potential wellfields for new water opportunities in the area.

9. Announcements and Other Business

Chair Jones announced that a tour of the Cherry Hill Water Production Facility would replace the next meeting in March. Ms. Virginia Singer stated that she would send out a poll to determine which Friday worked best and that Polk County Utilities had proposed either March 13 or March 27.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:01 a.m.