



**AGRICULTURAL AND GREEN INDUSTRY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING  
TUESDAY, September 10, 2024 – 10:00 AM**

**MINUTES**

---

**Committee Members Present**

Eric Muecke, City of Tampa Parks & Recreation Dept.  
Dennis Carlton, Jr., FL Cattlemen's Association  
Michael Matteson., FL Citrus Mutual  
Curt Williams, FL Farm Bureau Federation  
Jay Vogel, FL Forestry Association  
Alan Jones, FL Fruit & Vegetable Association  
Mikayla Rogers, FL Fruit & Vegetable Association (alt)  
Gail Huff, FL Irrigation Society  
Brienne Reichenbach, FL Strawberry Growers Assoc. (alt)  
David Boozer, FL Tropical Fish Farms Association  
Simon Bollin, Hillsborough Co. Extension Service  
Shawn Steed, Hillsborough Co. Extension Service (alt)  
Andy Jorgensen, On Top of the World Utilities  
Brandon Sites, On Top of the World Utilities (alt)  
Travis Council, Turfgrass Producers of FL  
Betsy McGill, Turfgrass Producers of FL (alt)  
Don Rainey, UF Institute of Food & Agricultural Science (alt)

**Staff Members**

Adrienne Vining  
Brent White  
Candice Harris  
Carole Estes  
Dayton Buxton  
Jay Hoecker  
Jennette Seachrist  
Jeremy McKay  
Jerry Harding  
Josh Campbell  
Michelle Weaver  
Robyn Felix  
Steve Desmith  
Taylor Greenan

**Governing Board Liaison**

Dustin Rowland

**Board Administrative Support**

Virginia Singer  
Barbara Matrone

**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, September 10, 2024.

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 June 11, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the June 11, 2024 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

**4. Public Comments**

None.

## **5. Overview of Best Management Practices Manuals**

Mr. JP Fraites, Assistant Director, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) gave an overview of the Best Management Practices (BMP) Manuals. One of the new features is the list of projects created together with the water management districts and the Department of Environmental Protection, on efforts to use our agricultural landowners and producers as resources to implement some of the larger scale regional water quality projects.

FDACS is in the process of updating all nine of its BMP manuals in one year. Each manual is in a different timeline of being adopted. The rulemaking process is extensive, but progress is being made. Mr. Fraites discussed many reasons for updating the BMP manuals which includes creating specificity, ensuring the manuals reflect current law, eliminating practices that are not related to water quality, and updating the practices to reflect the increased understanding of all BMPs that were originally adopted and the technological advances that have taken place. They also want the BMPs to relate to the narrative of the checklist and to have a more consistent structure across the manuals. The manuals have not been updated since the last two major changes in 2016 for the springs protection law and in 2020 when the implementation verification (IV) site visits became every two years.

The manuals are being separated into two sections, Part A, which is the checklist and Part B which is the guidance information and resources. There are two colored coded sections, the purple practices which are fairly uniform and the green which are specific practices to the commodity. Those enrolled in multiple practices will be able to see those as well as commodity specific green practices.

Mr. Fraites then discussed small farms and specialty livestock and stated that they have identified a gap in coverage for enrollments. They are required to enroll agricultural operations within a Basin Management Action Plan. As of 2022, they have 18,717 farms between 10 and 49 acres, and 12,303 farms between one and nine acres in Florida. For this manual, small farms are typically those less than 50 acres. Small farms are often diverse in both size and commodity type. Small farm commodities may include field crops, nurseries, greenhouses, livestock operations such as goats, sheep, ducks, cows, and pigs, or any combination of these.

Mr. Fraites concluded by discussing when to do the new BMPs. Enrollment must be updated with the most recent version at the time of the next BMP IV site visit or the next time an enrollee enters into a cost share agreement with FDACS. A producer or landowner enrolling a parcel of land under a manual for the first time or an enrollee updating their enrollment to a revised rule or manual must implement any new BMP requirements within 18 months of enrollment or update. He also discussed the many requirements of how to keep agricultural and financial information, and how to download and apply to the program. Mr. Fraites also discussed the producer's eligibility requirement that the property where the prospective project is located must be in production for at least one year prior to applying, regardless of ownership lease. The producer must have an active Notice of Intent to Implement Agricultural BMPs for the property where the proposed project will take place, and an IV site visit must have been performed within the last two years.

Discussion ensued.

## **6. FARMS Status for FY2024**

Ms. Carole Estes, FARMS Program Manager, gave a status update on FARMS and Mini-FARMS programs for FY2024. The Governing Board approved three projects in August and will vote on two projects this September. If approved, they will finish the year with nine projects, with an estimated \$3.04 million in requested funding, 637,000 gallons per day (gpd) of additional offset, and a reduction in nutrient loading of more than 2,000 pounds. More than 250 projects have been approved since 2003, with an estimated offset of 32.5 million gallons per day (mgd). Furthermore, 85% of their projects are still operational with actual groundwater savings of 24.5 mgd. These projects represent more than \$92 million in total project costs with the District averaging 58% of that cost for more than \$54 million reimbursed. The FARMS projects can be categorized into four different types: alternative water supply (AWS), conservation, nutrient reduction, and cold protection. About 75% of District projects are AWS with more than 86% of the groundwater offset also coming from AWS projects. About 22% of District

projects are conservation projects with 14% of their total groundwater offset coming from conservation projects. Conservation projects can include automated pump control, weather stations, automated valves, and irrigation conversions. Since 2020 District policy has included nutrient management projects across the District. In that time period an estimate of 7,758 pounds of nitrogen loading per year has been prevented primarily through fertigation systems. These calculations do not include the potential for nutrient detention in AWS reservoirs. Cold protection technology includes wind machines used by blueberry growers, crop cloth used by strawberry growers, and alternative water supply used by a variety of commodities. It has been estimated that cold protection projects have saved an average of 59.7 million gallons per year since these projects began in 2011.

In the last few years there has been a shift in the commodities of those interested in participating with the District. Citrus and row crops were close to 65% of District projects in the first six years. Sod and strawberries were only at 17%. In the last five years, sod and strawberries were 60% where citrus and row crops were only at 17%.

This year 65 Mini-FARMS projects were approved. By June, the District expended the whole \$500,000 that was budgeted. These projects are estimated to reduce groundwater use by more than 377,000 gpd. Since the program started in 2007, the District has funded more than 420 projects for an estimated reduction of nearly 2 mgd, with District funding of just over \$2 million. Since 2020, the District has worked to improve the program due to its popularity. One revision included reducing the irrigated acreage limit to 100 acres, resulting in an increase of the number of farms that could make use of conservation best management practices. Other changes were increasing the maximum reimbursement to \$10,000 per project and increasing the budget to \$500,000 each year. The application process was also enhanced.

Ms. Estes showed a graph of Mini-FARMS funding since 2007 and discussed more growers are taking advantage of improved technology and the Mini-FARMS program to help with reductions in water, nutrient loading, and operational costs.

Ms. Estes concluded by stating that pending Governing Board approval of the recommended FY25 and anticipated FY26 budgets should stay the same. Staff are working on a communications plan for the northern region to help increase participation and conservation. The Model Farms Economic Study will be updated in 2025 which sets the cost and benefit metric that the projects must meet for approval. Outreach activities will continue for all commodities to work with growers to better utilize the program.

Mr. Simon Bollin asked about the budget allocation regarding the Mini-Farms program in the last couple of years and if there was a carry over on those amounts. Ms. Estes responded that it is easy to lose it every year but this year they expended all of their funds by June, so they see an increasing interest. Liaison Dustin Rowland asked about how much money was left over this year that did not go to producers. Ms. Estes responded that \$1 million was expended for the FARMS program and the entire \$500,000 was expended for the Mini-FARMS program.

## **7. Sunshine Law**

Ms. Taylor Greenan, Attorney, gave a presentation on the Sunshine Law. The Florida Sunshine Law provides a basic right of public access to governmental proceedings at both the state and local levels and is recognized in the Florida Constitution. It also applies to any board, commission, or advisory committee of any state agency, county, municipal corporation, or political subdivision. The Sunshine Law prohibits committee members from engaging in private discussions with each other about District business either in person, by electronic communication or by social media. Additionally, committee members may not use non-members as a liaison to communicate information between members. The three basic requirements of the Sunshine Law are that meetings must be open to the public, reasonable notice of meetings must be given to the public, and minutes for committee meetings must be taken and promptly recorded.

Ms. Greenan then discussed the requirement of meetings needing to be open to the public. A meeting under the Sunshine Law is any communication between two or more committee members regarding

some matter that will foreseeably come before the District's Governing Board for action and does not require any physical presence. A meeting under Sunshine Law can be any form of communication such as speaking, whispering, writing, texting, emailing, electronically communicating, or signing a document. A one-way communication does not qualify as a meeting. Committee members should make their best judgement in matters relating to District business and that will likely come before the Board.

Sunshine law violations are treated as non-criminal infractions and can be fined up to \$500 unless a person is knowingly in violation. In that case a person may be charged with a second-degree misdemeanor, can be sentenced to a term of imprisonment for up to 60 days in a county jail, and fined up to \$500. Additionally, the Sunshine Law violation could subject the District to civil lawsuit in which case both the District and committee members would be liable for attorney's fees, and anyone convicted may be suspended or removed from their position. Any action taken by the Board in violation of the Sunshine Law is invalid. If there has been a Sunshine Law violation, and a subsequent vote resulting in agency action, the violations may be "cured." The Board must engage in a fully open, public discussion on the matter and arrive at an independent collective opinion.

There are some implications when it comes to social media. Committee members may post about one-way comments or opinions about District business on social media, but these posts may become Sunshine Law violations if they evolve into online discussions on matters that will foreseeably come before the Board for action. Some examples of those violations would be communicating about District business over the phone or via text, discussing District business during a recess of an advisory committee meeting, or an inaudible discussion while sitting at the dais during an advisory committee meeting. If a member posts a comment on either their personal Facebook page or the District's Facebook page about District business, that is not in violation because it is a one-way communication, but if a member comments, "likes" or shares the post, that would be considered in violation of the Sunshine Law.

In conclusion, Ms. Greenan stated that advisory committee members are subject to the Sunshine Law and must not discuss District business with other committee members except at a public meeting, and refrain from using social media as a forum for discussing District business.

**8. Field Trip Discussion**

Mr. Travis Council requested for Ms. Estes and her team to bring back some examples of FARMS and Mini-FARMS projects. Ms. Virginia Singer responded that she would get with Ms. Estes to come up with a couple projects or ideas that can be presented to the committee and also conduct a survey to see what date would work best for the committee. Mr. Roland showed an interest in a strawberry farm or something in Hillsborough or Manatee County due to the area's growth, and to see what they are doing to save water and frost protection.

**9. Development of Agenda Topics**

Mr. Bollin requested a presentation on transitions in crops, cropping systems and how they affect water use. Mr. Jay Vogel suggested the topic of what the District is doing to control exotics on District lands, and specifically if there are any newer methodologies being employed. Chair Jones suggested the topic of the citrus industry and the water availability within the region.

**10. Announcements and Other Business**

None.

**11. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 11:28 a.m.