

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY FARM BUREAU LETTERHEAD

July 27, 2006

TO: Members of the Watershed Study Advisory Committee

FROM: Katie A. Edwards, Executive Director

SUBJ: Implementation Strategies for Agriculture

The Dade County Farm Bureau respectfully submits the following implementation strategies for inclusion in the Final Progress Report. These implementation strategies will replace the existing ones, as outlined in the Draft Final Progress Report.

If you concur with the validity of these implementation strategies, we ask that you vote to adopt them and then instruct the consultants to include them in the Final Progress Report.

Some strategies are taken directly from the University of Florida's Miami-Dade County Agricultural Land Retention Study: Summary and Recommendations. Others have been developed by the Dade County Farm Bureau.

According to the University of Florida, "The continuing population growth of Miami-Dade County appears to be a given, and little can be done about it. The profitability of farming is influenced by many factors, many of which are affected by the marketplaces where they can sell their products or by policy makers at national and state levels. Most of these factors are largely beyond the influence of local government or the local agricultural community. The recommendations offered here pertain to actions that local government can initiate alone or in conjunction with state and federal agencies.

"First of all, at the local level, any proposed regulations that have potentially adverse financial effects on agriculture or on owners of agricultural land should be carefully reviewed by the Agricultural Practices Study Advisory Board (commonly known as the "Ag Practices Committee"). A preferable alternative approach would be to involve the Ag Practices Committee in discussions of perceived problems before solutions or regulations are decided upon. However, once potential courses of action are identified, the Ag Practices Committee should have adequate time and resources (perhaps an economic analyst retained by the County) to thoroughly analyze their effects on various interests within the agricultural community. The Ag Practices Committee should strive to base their recommendations to the County Commission upon quantitative data whenever possible to enhance its credibility.

The second related recommendation is to begin a systematic review of existing local regulations, permits and fees that reduce profitability for existing farmers or agribusinesses or provide significant barriers to farming or agribusiness ventures. Costs

and benefits should be examined to identify those regulations, permitting processes or fees that can be eliminated or modified to reduce negative impacts on agriculture.

A third recommendation is for Miami-Dade County to provide additional support for UF/IFAS extension programs that focus on development and dissemination of best management practices (BMPs) for crops that do not currently have BMPs. Many of these crops are only grown on a commercial scale in Miami-Dade County. Extension specialists can play a vital role in team building to achieve productive research and education programs involving growers and researchers at the Tropical Research and Education Center (TREC). If appropriate BMPs are not developed and adopted, environmental regulations could effectively put some producers out of business.

Finally, if the goal is to retain agricultural land at all costs, it may be necessary to buy land outright or buy agricultural conservation easements. Miami-Dade agriculture occupies a unique niche in the Everglades Restoration Program and in other environmental protection programs in the County as well. Agriculture is especially vulnerable to environmental restrictions and the costs they impose. As the Everglades Restoration Program unfolds and pending water restrictions are imposed, Miami-Dade County agriculture could become history if its positive contributions are not considered.”

Additional implementation strategies proposed by the Dade County Farm Bureau are as follows:

County policies directed towards the preservation of open space should fully accept the economic realities for agriculture. We strongly believe the County should delete the performance standard of “No net loss of agricultural designated lands outside the Urban Development Boundary (UDB) or environmentally sensitive lands” from its Strategic Area Plans. Furthermore, such benchmarks should not be used to rate the performance of the Department of Planning and Zoning and the Agricultural Manager.

The Agricultural Manager plays a vital role in serving as a County liaison to the agricultural community. The County should continue its funding for this position, as well as full-time support staff to the Agricultural Manager. County staff should work in conjunction with the Agricultural Manager when developing any regulation, program or ordinance affecting agriculture.

The University of Florida completed the Economic Impact of Agriculture and Agribusiness in Miami-Dade County in 2000. Miami-Dade County should fund an economic impact analysis every ten years; the study should be completed by the University of Florida since they have the expertise. The directive should come from the office of the Agricultural Manager.

In order to stay competitive in a global market, agribusinesses must utilize cutting-edge technology. Cost-share programs should be developed so that the burden of cost does not lie solely on the grower. Palm Beach County, for example, provides cost-share funding through the Agriculture Enhancement Council. These funds are used for job creation and

agribusiness expansion. Funding comes from Palm Beach County which purchased sensitive lands and then leased them to agriculture. The funds generated by the leases are then used for the cost-share program. A similar program could be developed whereby the money generated from agricultural leases of county-owned lands can be used to directly enhance agribusiness.

Increased water levels in Everglades National Park have raised the canal levels and water tables in south Miami-Dade County. This increase has led to the demise of commercial tropical fruit groves, causing serious financial losses for growers. We recommend that Miami-Dade County reinstate the Office of Water Management to protect residents and agricultural interests from flooding.

Greater attention must be given to agribusiness, in particular to the economic impact provided by agriculture, \$1.09 billion. The Beacon Council, the County's economic development partnership, can assist by focusing on agriculture in its Economic Quarterly Report and its news program on Cable-TAP.

Finally, creative solutions should be developed to deal with the expected 30,000 acres of excess agricultural land by 2025. Any proposed solutions should honor private property rights.