



Florida Department of Environmental Protection



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DEP PROVIDES \$1.5 MILLION TO SFWMD FOR PILOT “WATER FARMING” PROJECT

~“Water Farming” identified as potentially cost-effective, innovative water management practice~

TALLAHASSEE - As part of a cooperative effort to address the water restoration issues across Florida, the Department of Environmental Protection has awarded \$1.5 million in grant funds to the South Florida Water Management District, or SFWMD, to investigate the benefits of “water farming” through a pilot study. The award is being matched by a contribution from the SFWMD for a total commitment of \$3 million. The study has evolved as part of the water management district's Dispersed Water Management Program, which encourages property owners to retain water on their land rather than drain it which, in turn, reduces nutrient pollution to downstream waters.

“The watersheds in Florida, as well as their restoration, are critical to the citizens of Florida,” said Department Deputy Secretary for Water Policy and Ecosystem Restoration Drew Bartlett. “To address Florida’s water quality issues, it is essential we explore all ideas and opportunities that can ultimately help Florida’s valuable water bodies.”

The phrase “water farming” was coined by the Indian River Citrus League, in reference to an agricultural entity providing water retention or water storage on fallow land as an alternative to citrus production. Managing water on privately owned lands is one tool to reduce the amount of polluted stormwater discharged into water bodies and coastal estuaries. Water Farming is a potentially cost-effective approach for retaining runoff and reducing the excessive nutrient loads that afflict many of Florida’s watersheds. In order to assess the benefits and measure the efficiency of the Water Farming practice, the SFWMD has entered into cooperative agreements with three landowners to conduct pilot projects. Under this agreement, the water management district will cooperate with landowners to evaluate and document the implementation costs and environmental benefits of each project. After construction is completed each pilot project will operate for two full years.

“South Florida’s environment requires a broad set of tools to achieve restoration goals,” said SFWMD Executive Director Blake Guillory. “Water farming pilot projects are an opportunity to expand our toolbox to improve ecosystems and watersheds,

including the St. Lucie River and Estuary.”

Two of the pilots will take place in Martin County, at Bull Hammock Ranch Grove and the Caulkins Citrus Company. A third pilot will be tested in St. Lucie County, at the Evans Properties Grove. These pilots are expected to have positive impacts on the St. Lucie Watershed and Indian River Lagoon by reducing excess discharges. The project is supported by the Indian River Lagoon Citrus League, the Florida Farm Bureau Federation and other state and local grower associations. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) are also very supportive of the Water Farming demonstration project as it will complement their ongoing efforts to reduce the excessive nutrients present in the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie Watershed.

About the Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection is the state's principal environmental agency, created to protect, conserve and manage Florida's environment and natural resources. The Department enforces federal and state environmental laws, protects Florida's air and water quality, cleans up pollution, regulates solid waste management, promotes pollution prevention and acquires environmentally-sensitive lands for preservation. The agency also maintains a statewide system of parks, trails and aquatic preserves. To view the Department's website log on to www.dep.state.fl.us.

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