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Total Clips: 4

Headline	Date	Outlet	Reporter
<a href="#">Jeff Kottkamp Takes Tea Pledge Against Big Sugar Deal; Bondi, Benson Don't</a>	08/20/2010	Sunshine State News	Ward, Kenric
<a href="#">Tea Party willing to sacrifice \$10 million of taxpayer money to sink Crist's U.S. Sugar land deal</a>	08/20/2010	Sun Sentinel - Deerfield Beach Bureau	Reid, Andy
<a href="#">Amended land purchase addresses changing economic conditions</a>	08/20/2010	Glades County Democrat	South Florida Water Management District
<a href="#">Southern Gardens Growers, Vendors and Friends' Company responds to state purchase of citrus land</a>	08/20/2010	Glades County Democrat	Rick Kress

## Jeff Kottkamp Takes Tea Pledge Against Big Sugar Deal; Bondi, Benson Don't

[Return to Top](#)

08/20/2010  
Sunshine State News  
Ward, Kenric

Score one for Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp by default.

Kottkamp was the lone Republican attorney general candidate to earn a perfect score from Tea Party in Action for signing a pledge to oppose an Everglades land purchase that the group dubs a "Big Sugar bailout."

Kottkamp's rivals in a closely fought attorney general primary -- Pam Bondi and Holly Benson -- declined to sign on.

In a statement to Sunshine State News, Bondi wrote:

"The requested pledge is on a very complex deal that has changed multiple times, involves multiple state government, federal government and water district jurisdictions and has two federal judges involved. I don't want to lock into a pledge based on a bad deal today that could keep me from publicly supporting a good deal for Florida in the future."

The controversial Everglades deal was engineering by Gov. Charlie Crist and U.S. Sugar Corp. three years ago. Since then, it has been repeatedly downsized in size and price. Last week, the South Florida Water Management District agreed to purchase 28,000 acres of U.S. Sugar land for \$197 million.

Given Crist's involvement and the governor's subsequent departure from the Republican Party, Kottkamp has sought to distance himself from the man who chose him as his running mate. Last month, Kottkamp endorsed Republican

Marco Rubio in the U.S. Senate race in which Crist is running as an independent.

Kottkamp's pledge appears to carry the dual benefit of staking out his independence from Crist and warming the Tea Party crowd, which has been leaning toward Bondi.

Benson's campaign did not return e-mail and phone messages.

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## Tea Party willing to sacrifice \$10 million of taxpayer money to sink Crist's U.S. Sugar land deal

[Return to Top](#)

08/20/2010

Sun Sentinel - Deerfield Beach Bureau

Reid, Andy

Tea Party willing to sacrifice \$10 million of taxpayer money to sink Crist's U.S. Sugar land deal

By Andy Reid August 19, 2010 06:05 PM Tea Party activists who preach fiscal responsibility are willing to sacrifice \$10 million of South Florida taxpayers' money to try to scrap a \$197 million Everglades restoration land deal.

Tea Party protests failed to stop the South Florida Water Management District from last week approving the contract to buy 26,800 acres of U.S. Sugar Corp. farmland for Everglades restoration.

The district and U.S. Sugar plan to close on the \$197 million land deal Oct. 11.

On Thursday, Tea Party supporters continued their email campaign against the land deal – this time calling for the district to pay a \$10 million termination fee to get out of moving ahead with the purchase.

“If we back out, we lose \$10 million ... but we save our reserves and stop a tax increase,” the cookie-cutter email messages said.

District officials, who lead Everglades restoration, have maintained that the U.S. Sugar land deal would not require a property tax increase or drain the reserves in the district's \$1 billion budget.

Gov. Charlie Crist in June 2008 first proposed buying U.S. Sugar land for restoration efforts that include building a system of reservoirs and treatment areas to restore stormwater flows between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.

The economic downturn and corresponding drop in property tax revenue led to the deal being downsized three times.

What started as the district potentially borrowing \$1.75 billion deal to buy all of U.S. Sugar's more than 180,000 acres now calls for using \$197 million of district reserves to buy two pieces of U.S. Sugar land totaling 26,800 acres.

Environmentalists still hail the deal as an opportunity to acquire strategically located farmland land once off limits to Everglades restoration.

Opponents, led by the Miccosukee Tribe and U.S. Sugar rival Florida Crystals, argue that the deal still costs taxpayers too much and takes money away from other long-planned Everglades restoration projects.

The newest version of the land deal still must survive legal challenges filed by the Miccosukee and Florida Crystals.

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## Amended land purchase addresses changing economic conditions

[Return to Top](#)

08/20/2010

Glades County Democrat

South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board today approved unanimously with one abstention a revised strategy to acquire land from the United States Sugar Corporation for Everglades restoration. The amended agreement provides for the initial purchase of approximately 26,800 acres of strategically located land south of Lake Okeechobee, with options to purchase another 153,000 acres should economic conditions allow in the future.

"The new terms allow the District to move forward with this opportunity to restore the River of Grass in a way that both better fits Florida's current economic climate and also addresses important federal mandates related to the Everglades," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Eric Buermann. "By utilizing available cash on-hand and a fiscally prudent pay-as-you-go approach, the District will avoid new debt while ensuring the continued delivery of mission-critical services. The agency now also has immediate access to thousands of acres of property with high restoration potential while preserving the option to acquire additional land to benefit the Everglades in the future."

Under the amended terms, the District would initially invest approximately \$197 million in cash to immediately acquire 26,800 acres, or 42 square miles, of land in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) and C-139 basin for water quality and environmental restoration projects. The District would have options to purchase the remaining 153,000 acres of land from U.S. Sugar for up to 10 years.

Highlights of the amended acquisition include:

- Acquisition of 17,900 citrus acres in Hendry County to improve water quality in the C-139 basin, where phosphorus loads have been historically high. This parcel, just west of thousands of acres of existing constructed wetlands, can be used for water storage and treatment facilities that would improve the quality of water flowing into the Everglades.

- Purchase of 8,900 acres of sugarcane land in Palm Beach County to benefit the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge by expanding existing Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) and increasing water quality treatment for the S-5A basin, just east of Lake Okeechobee.

- An exclusive 3-year option to purchase either a specifically identified 46,800 acres or the entire 153,000 acres at a fixed price of \$7,400 per acre. U.S. Sugar could sell the option property to a third party but must retain the District's option.

- After the exclusive option period, a subsequent 2-year, non-exclusive option to purchase the approximately 46,800 acres at Fair Market Value. U.S. Sugar could sell all or a part of the option property, but subject to a Right of First Refusal by the District.

- A subsequent 7-year, non-exclusive option to purchase the remaining acres at Fair Market Value. U.S. Sugar could sell all or a part of the option property, but subject to a Right of First Refusal by the District.

- Under the revised contracts, closing on the 26,800 acres would take place in October 2010.

In identifying the 26,800 acres for this acquisition, the District evaluated science and engineering factors as well as its existing requirements and mandates, all of which drive the agency's restoration and water quality improvement efforts. This acquisition, together with the Talisman lands, would give the District access to more than 50,000 acres of land south of Lake Okeechobee needed for project construction that will bring meaningful water quality and environmental improvements to the Everglades.

Today's action by the SFWMD Governing Board is the culmination of more than two years of work since Governor Charlie Crist first announced on June 24, 2008, that the District would begin negotiations with the U.S. Sugar Corporation to acquire land south of Lake Okeechobee for Everglades restoration.

The downsized, more affordable acquisition recognizes that economic conditions have changed dramatically since the original announcement and a subsequent revised agreement approved by the Governing Board in May 2009. The District's property tax revenues have declined by nearly \$150 million, or 30 percent, since 2008.

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## **Southern Gardens Growers, Vendors and Friends' Company responds to state purchase of citrus land**

08/20/2010

Glades County Democrat

Rick Kress

[Return to Top](#)

The on-going transaction, whereby the South Florida Water Management District has been negotiating a land sale with U.S. Sugar for the purpose of Everglades restoration, is approaching a conclusion. U.S. Sugar's Board of Directors and the Governing Board of the SFWMD last week approved revised contracts for the purchase of 27,000 acres of US Sugar and Southern Gardens Citrus land; closing is scheduled by October 11, 2010.

From the Southern Gardens perspective, this deal affects only the land associated with citrus production from the Southern Grove unit. This transaction today does not affect the grove operations at the Devil's Garden or the Dunwody/Alcoma units. Under the terms of the revised agreement, Southern Gardens will continue to lease and operate the Southern Grove until such time that the SFWMD provides a one (1) year notice for initiation of restoration project construction. In the meantime, Southern Gardens will continue to grow and harvest oranges on this property (as well as the Devil's Garden and Dunwody/Alcoma units which we retain).

Upon completion of this initial acquisition, should the economy and tax revenues improve, the SFWMD retains the option in the future to purchase additional land from U.S. Sugar/Southern Gardens.

As we have stated previously and want to convey again, the Southern Gardens Citrus Processing facility is not affected as a result of this initial land purchase agreement or as a result of this transaction at any time in the future.

We have and will continue to produce and ship high quality NFC, concentrated orange juice and by-products. Southern Gardens Citrus Processing remains the only production facility in close proximity to the high volume of citrus trees and fruit in this region.

During the lengthy period since the initial proposed transaction with SFWMD was announced, Southern Gardens has continued to operate its entire citrus business with an eye to the future. Specific areas of focus to date and going forward are as follows: Southern Gardens is a leader in researching, educating and dealing with the current citrus disease; HLB/greening. Our company has been invested significant funds in several internal disease research projects. These projects have progressed to the point that citrus trees that have proven in the lab to be resistant to canker and greening were planted by us in a USDA approved site for field testing.

These projects plus several others continue and we believe that in the near future, Southern Gardens will find a viable solution to the greening and canker disease.

Our nursery operation in northern Florida is producing high quality citrus trees for supply to our own groves as well as on a commercial basis to growers. We have been resetting trees in our groves for the last two (2) years and will continue to do so in the future. We are in the process of doubling our budwood supply at the nursery in advance of a further expansion to the facility. These investments will position us as a supplier of disease-free trees, with the end result of being able to supply juice to our customers long into the future.

At our processing facility, we are working on the expansion plans that will double our production capacity for frozen pulp cells. We are evaluating alternative transportation modes for juices and by-products as well as alternative energy sources to run the plant in order to reduce our carbon footprint.

With the detection of the black spot disease in Florida at the end of the 2009/2010 harvest, USSC/SGC is setting up our PCR lab to provide analytical capabilities for the Florida citrus industry on this disease for this next harvest year. Consistent with the testing for HLB/greening, these tests will be done at no charge to the grower.

Contrary to the false rumors and speculation involving Southern Gardens Citrus Processing over the last three years, our business remains a vibrant part of this industry and as illustrated above, is positioned well for the future.

Southern Gardens Citrus plans to continue operating its processing plant and facilities.

