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9/1: Letters to the Editor

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It's not the farmers who are polluting Everglades

The *Sentinel's* editorial, "End Sugar's Sweet Deal," on Aug. 15 uses the same, tired rhetoric that places the burden of Everglades decay and cleanup on sugar-cane farmers.

It is ironic an Orlando newspaper can feel a sense of moral certitude in branding others as polluters. Scientific data tells a different story.

The South Florida Water Management District's records show in the past five years an average of 97 percent of the phosphorus polluting the Everglades entered Lake Okeechobee from northern watersheds, then traveled south to the Everglades Agricultural Area.

In contrast, the district's annual report on the EAA's performance shows the farming region cut phosphorus levels by 68 percent this year.

EAA farmers are among the strongest advocates for restoration. Farmers were environmentalists before the invention of the highly political environmental lobby. We understand sustainable agriculture and Everglades restoration work together. In fact, the only successful Everglades restoration has occurred in the EAA, with the implementation of Best Management Practices and stormwater-treatment areas.

EAA farmers have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars and given up tens of thousands of acres for restoration.

Science-based restoration strategies call for storage and treatment of polluted runoff from developments ranging from Orlando to Lake Okeechobee before it enters the lake. Unfortunately, the district's purchase of U.S. Sugar's lands eliminates most storage north of the lake, leaving it in dire health.

Sentinel readers deserve the facts and, with the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee, they deserve to see real restoration.

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