



Florida Climate Smart Agriculture:



Healthy Farms- Healthy Bays Initiative

Through this new initiative, FLCSA will collaborate with aligned partners in connecting upland farmers and ranchers with downstream aquatic ecosystem stakeholders in a joint effort to: enhance sustainability of agricultural operations; and improve water quality, fisheries and habitat in key Gulf Coast bays and estuaries. Beginning in the Suwannee River watershed, FLCSA will help farmers think about and experiment with solution pathways and tactics that reduce external inputs, close nutrient loops, regenerate soils and concurrently produce agricultural and food products, protect and renew ecosystems and provide climate change solutions and other benefits to the farm enterprise and to society.

The goal is to build on existing restoration plans and projects, using best available science and leading technical advisors, to achieve a new future- a future where healthy and productive bays, rivers and streams across the peninsula are underpinned and supported by a vibrant and sustainable agricultural economy.

HF-HB Co-Chairs- Randall Dasher and Ed Chiles

UF/IFAS Leads- Mike Allen, Bob Hochmuth and Jack Payne

Decisions to date:

- agreement reached to start work in the Suwannee basin and demonstrate proof of concept before expanding to other watersheds
- goal: form a multi-stakeholder alliance that will work to enhance agriculture AND aquatic resilience and viability
- Important focal points:
 - a) Market mechanisms (payments for ecosystems services)
 - b) Gov grants to help producers absorb costs of systems and practices that will enable sustainable productivity, improve water quality and benefit downstream stakeholders
 - c) Artificial Intelligence and modeling verification tools
 - d) Research and technical assistance
 - e) Partnerships

Next Steps:

- Recruit farmer/fishery/conservation/business/government partners to comprise the HF-HB leadership team; inaugural meeting to be held in Q1.

Deliverable:

A roadmap that identifies needed changes in land use practices, research, education, and policy to keep Florida agriculture profitable while providing nutritious food, clean energy and ecosystem services such as wildlife habitat, water storage and filtration and carbon sequestration.

Measure Success

- Success will be measured by 1) the breadth and depth of the multi-stakeholder partners that participate in this cross boundary initiative; 2) agreement that is reached on a action plan that identifies needed changes in land use practices, research, education, and policy to keep Florida agriculture profitable while providing nutritious food, clean energy and ecosystem services such as wildlife habitat, water storage and filtration and carbon sequestration; and 3) the willingness of project participants to provide leadership in engaging their peers and elected officials on the need for policies and programs to achieve desired outcomes.

Data Use

- Data validating the conditions of aquatic ecosystems and upland agricultural lands will be used to formulate our action plan and motivate agricultural and fishery stakeholders to unite and form an uncommon partnership that will collaborate to achieve win-win outcomes. Examples include sea grass health, bivalve and fishery inventories, soil erosion rates, water quality and nutrient loadings.

Budget: \$100,000 (12 months)