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# **DRAFT DOCUMENT**

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## **A NEW LOOK AT AGRICULTURE**

A Discussion Paper Devoted to:  
Redefining agriculture's role in our economy, landscape, environment  
& social culture

### **Executive Summary**

Excerpts from a Concept Paper  
that explains why agriculture is important to each one of us.

Presented to the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Working Group  
March 26, 2001

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Copies of the Full Document and instructions on how to adapt this document for use at the local level are available for download at <http://us-farm.com/download.htm>.

**The New Look at Agriculture calls for redefining agriculture’s role in our economy, landscape, environment & social culture. This process will depend on five key components:**

- I. *Producer Profitability***
- II. *A Conducive Business Climate***
- III. *Adequate Infrastructure***
- IV. *Enhancing Environmental Compatibility***
- V. *Integrating Agriculture into the Landscape***

**Below are the guiding principles along with key recommendations and priority actions that will support achievement of these key components.**

## **I. PRODUCER PROFITABILITY**

**Guiding principle** - *Without profit, there will be no agriculture.*

### **Recommendations**

1. Improve opportunities for **profitability**, especially for small- and medium-size producers
2. Improve **education** of consumers and policy makers to expand awareness about where food comes from; what it takes to have a safe, affordable and abundant food supply; current threats to South Florida’s agricultural productivity; and the underlying premise that *agriculture is vital to sustaining our lives.*
3. Reduce the impact on profitability caused by 1) **invasive plants, pests and diseases** that often accompany shipments and passengers coming into the state and 2) the loss of “**minor crop**” tools
4. Initiate **economic development** efforts to retain and capitalize on existing agricultural activities
5. Expand **marketing** to increase sales of agricultural products from South Florida
6. Address **trade** imbalances to ensure that all foreign produce meets American food safety and environmental standards so South Florida producers can operate on a “level playing field”
7. Examine the effects of **consolidation** on small- and medium-size producers and the nation’s food security and identify policies that put small- and medium-size producers and South Florida’s continued ability to maintain its food production capability at risk

### **Priority actions**

#### **PROFITABILITY**

**Conclusion:** Need to find ways to improve opportunities for profitability, especially for small-and medium-size producers.

## EDUCATION

**Conclusion:** Need to find ways to improve education of consumers and policy makers to expand awareness about where food comes from; what it takes to have a safe, affordable and abundant food supply; current threats to South Florida 's agricultural productivity; and the underlying premise that *agriculture is a vital part of the infrastructure that is necessary to sustain our lives*

## INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL/LOSS OF "MINOR CROP " TOOLS

**Conclusion:** Need to find ways to reduce the impact on profitability caused by invasive plants, pests and diseases that often accompany shipments and passengers coming into the state.

## II. A CONDUCTIVE BUSINESS CLIMATE

**Guiding principle** - *"How law works, not what it aims to do, is what is driving us crazy."*

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Improve the regulatory climate** so agricultural operations can comply with laws that are important to public health, safety and protection of the environment, without being placed at an economic disadvantage to foreign producers and other types of land uses that could displace agriculture and result in even greater environmental impacts. Next to improving profitability, this is the single most important step that needs to be taken to improve the viability of agricultural enterprises in South Florida.

In order to accomplish this, there is a need to engage farm groups and regulators working together in constructive efforts to improve the regulatory climate by such means as:

- developing standards that will *simplify* current rules, regulations and permitting procedures without weakening them;
- developing more efficient, cost-effective approaches for agricultural enterprises and business operations to comply with all "external" demands and requirements placed on these operations by society;
- using prototype programs to test "whole farm plans," "integrated operating plans" and other approaches to improve the regulatory climate; and
- providing training to policy makers, regulators and agency staff on the differences between agriculture and other types of land uses and businesses.

### **Also need to find ways to:**

2. Reduce unnecessary burdens and costs on agriculture due to **local government regulations** and permits
3. Better consider the needs and requirements of agriculture and integrate them into **all policy areas** and all phases of policy development where agriculture has an impact or is impacted.
4. **Adapt federal programs to state needs** to avoid the potential for adverse unintended consequences.

### **Priority action**

#### **IMPROVE REGULATORY CLIMATE**

**Conclusion:** Need to find ways to improve the regulatory climate so agricultural operations can comply with laws that are important to public health, safety and protection of the environment, without being

placed at an economic disadvantage to foreign producers and other types of land uses that could displace agriculture and result in even greater environmental impacts.

### **III. ADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Guiding Principle** - *Agriculture is essential to our livelihood. Without it, we will not survive. It is in our interest to give attention to all the infrastructure that agriculture needs to thrive.*

#### **Recommendations**

1. Improve the state's **transportation systems** to
  - coordinate state and county planning of road, rail, air and waterborne transportation facilities;
  - take the needs of agriculture into consideration;
  - provide for the transportation of agricultural products and supplies.
2. Ensure an ongoing, stable supply of trained and trainable **labor** for the agricultural industry. Also need practical, workable programs to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers in the agriculture industry.
3. Acknowledge and accommodate agriculture's concerns with the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) to achieve **environmental restoration** and meet the water-related needs of the region.

#### **Priority Action**

##### **ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION/REGIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT:**

**Conclusion:** Need to find ways to address agriculture's concerns with the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) to achieve environmental restoration and meet the water-related needs of the region.

### **IV. ENHANCING ENVIRONMENTAL COMPATIBILITY**

**Guiding Principle** - *Agriculture can be one of the best friends the environment has*

#### **Recommendations**

1. Celebrate, acknowledge and reward agricultural landowners and operators for their **private stewardship** efforts. One of the best ways to support and encourage the environmental value in the region is to take advantage of the strong stewardship ethic of many of the region's farmers and ranchers, and adjust programs to improve the ability of these owners and operators to nurture the ecological values associated with the lands under their care.
2. Determine what agricultural activity, if any, can take place on public lands and what public lands, if any, can be leased or sold back to agriculture producers. This **new approach to public land use** should be considered as a possible land management strategy and should be discussed by the **Working Group as part of its land acquisition strategy.**

## Priority Actions

### **PRIVATE STEWARDSHIP**

**Conclusion:** Need to find ways to celebrate, acknowledge and reward landowners and operators for their private stewardship efforts. Also need to find ways to adjust programs to improve the ability of these owners and operators to nurture the ecological values associated with the lands under their care.

### **NEW THINKING FOR THE MILLENNIUM:**

**Conclusion:** Need to find ways to determine what agricultural activity, if any, can take place on public lands and what public lands, if any, can be eased or sold back to agriculture producers. This issue should be considered as a possible land management strategy and should be discussed by the Working Group as part of its land acquisition strategy.

## V. INTEGRATING AGRICULTURE INTO THE LANDSCAPE

**Guiding Principle** - *Preserving land alone is not enough. Local and state governments also must preserve the conditions that allow the land to be used profitably for agriculture.*

### **Recommendations**

1. Provide **landowner equity**, so landowners can realize full value of their land without converting it out of agriculture. Retaining agriculture as a part of the landscape is essential to a sustainable ecosystem. However, land is currently undervalued in agriculture and overvalued in development; therefore, today's market tends to favor development.
2. Review **tax issues**. Consider creating more enlightened tax structures that reward responsible stewardship and use of land for food production. The current taxing system – federal, state, local – impacts the decisions of landowners and discourages the protection of natural resources and continuation of agriculture.
3. Reconcile urban development needs with their impact on agriculture and accommodate **new development** without displacing agriculture.
4. Address the problems and needs of **rural communities**. Rural communities are often built around nodes of agriculture production and services. These communities provide important economic contributions to the state; have a unique character and valued quality of life; and contain many important natural values, including open space; wildlife habitats, wetlands, and water recharge areas. However, state and federal policies currently are not sensitive enough to the problems and challenges faced by rural areas.

### Priority action

#### **LANDOWNER EQUITY**

**Conclusion:** Need to find better ways to provide landowner equity, so landowners can realize the full value of their land without converting it out of agriculture. Retaining agriculture as a part of the landscape

is essential to a sustainable ecosystem. However, land is currently undervalued in agriculture and overvalued in development; therefore, today 's market tends to favor development.