

Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy Development Contract – Draft Deliverables (5/10/24)

2.2.2.1. Provide a written mission statement and list of conceptual goals for the Strategy.

Mission Statement: Protect Alachua County’s agricultural resources through permanent conservation of farmland.

Agricultural resources are the primary means of production, including the land, soil, water, and people, which together comprise our agricultural community.

A cohesive agricultural land protection program has goals that fall under three main components:

Environmental

- Support Alachua County’s Comprehensive Plan for future land use goals
- Bridge gaps between existing conservation lands and expand conservation in unprotected areas
- Build climate resilience based on existing Alachua County goals
- Protect water resources unique to Alachua County

Cultural

- Maintain rural character and landscape of Alachua County
- Ensure local food security
- Provide equitable transfer and improve access of agricultural land

Economic

- Encourage and build partnerships between private entity local, state, and federal governments and protect taxpayer investment by utilizing cost share programs for purchased easements
- Protect rural economy and local agricultural networks
- Increase agricultural viability

2.2.2.2. Provide a Ranking Matrix and Scoring Criteria based on defined Strategy goals

Ranking Matrix

A ranking matrix and scoring criteria were developed based on the Strategies goals. The ranking matrix consists of 30 questions, which can be answered using a combination of an initial site visit and desktop review. The ranking matrix can be utilized to evaluate a particular project's feasibility as well as its ability to meet priorities of the proposed Strategy. It is important to note that the score of the ranking matrix may not justify pursuing one project over another despite receiving an overall higher score. All ranking matrix questions are scored to a maximum of 5 points. The first 12 questions are general screening questions that help evaluate the project's feasibility. The remaining 18 questions evaluate how the property meets a variety of goals for the proposed Strategy organized by each pillar of sustainability. All ranking matrix questions are scored to a maximum of 5 points.

1. Is the property zoned agricultural?

- Yes = 5 points

- No = 0 points

2. What is the primary current agriculture operation on the property?

- Horse Pasture = 1 point
- Row cropping (Center pivot irrigated) = 2 points
- Row cropping (Rainfed) = 5 points
- Grazing or pasture = 5 points
- Fruit production = 5 points
- Vegetable production = 5 points

3. Is the property greater than 50% agricultural land (timberlands excluded)?

- Yes = 5 Points
- No = 0 Points or consider referring to ACF for environmentally significant lands

4. Is the property less than two-thirds forested?

- Yes = 5 Points
- No = 0 Points or consider referring to ACF for environmentally significant lands

5. Are there any known hazardous sites located on the property?

- Yes = 0 Points
- No = 5 Points

6. How many structures other than residences are on the property? Do the structures support agricultural use or are they for other commercial purposes?

- Property contains greater than five structures, more than one of which do not support agricultural operation = 0 points
- Property contains less than five structures, more than one of which do not support agricultural operation = 3 points
- Property contains less than five structures, all of which support agricultural operation = 5 points

7. Percentage of farm offered for easement purchase

- 100% of farm = 5 points
- Less than 100% of farm = 0 points

8. What is the size of the offered easement acquisition?

- 150+ acres = 5 points

- 100-149 acres = 3 points
- 0 - 99 acres = 1 point

9. What is the landowners expectation of the acquisition timeline?

- Landowner expects or needs an immediate acquisition– 0 points
- Landowner understands easement acquisition is a lengthy process and could take years – 5 points

10. What is the ownership structure?

- Single ownership = 5 points
- Multiple owners with all parties agreeing to an easement = 5 points
- Multiple owners not in agreement to pursuing a conservation easement = 0 points

11. Does the landowner understand and agree to an easement purchase value based on a fair market appraisal?

- Yes = 5 points
- No = 0 Points

12. Will the acquisition contribute to a project from a previous or existing governmental land acquisition program.

- Obligated funding from a governmental land acquisition program = 5 Points
- Currently ranked on a governmental land acquisition program = 1 Points
- No obligated funding and not ranked on a governmental land acquisition program list = 0 Points

Environmental Impact Questions

1. Is the property currently enrolled in the FDACS BMP program or similar NRCS EQIP or CSP programs? If not, does the landowner agree to enroll in an applicable BMP program designed to reduce nutrient and water inputs?

- Yes = 5 points
- No = 0 Points

2. Does the landowner engage in management practices aimed at reducing nutrient and water inputs or practice regenerative agriculture principles? I.e. cover cropping, reduced tillage, soil testing,

- 3-5 practices = 5 points
- 1-3 practices = 3 points
- 0 practices = 0 points

3. Aquifer recharge ranking question

- 1 point = Very Low = (GREEN) eastern portion of County, no flow to streams or lakes. Confined Aquifer
- 2 points = Low = (GREEN) eastern portion of County with flow to streams or lakes through swamp or marsh. Confined Aquifer
- 3 points = Moderate = (GREEN or RED) eastern portion of county with direct conduit to aquifer, middle portion of county flat open land with on open water streams. Perforated Aquifer
- 4 points = High = (RED or YELLOW) middle portion of county on a water way that goes thru swamps, marshes or open bodies of water before the aquifer, western portion of county. Perforated or Unconfined Aquifer
- 5 points = Very High = (RED or YELLOW) middle portion of county on water body with direct unfiltered flow to Floridan Aquifer, western portion of county on water body or stream. Perforated or Unconfined Aquifer

(ArcGIS Question) Use Hydrogeology Group, Aquifer Confinement Zones

4. Is the property in a Santa Fe River, Watermelon Pond watershed or a watershed with an existing TMDL?

- Santa Fe Watershed - 5 points
- TMDL Area - 5 points
- Orange Creek Basin - 5 points
- Watermelon Pond Watershed - 5 Points
- Etoniah Creek Watershed - 3 points
- Alachua Stream System Watershed - 3 points
- Non-Contributing Surface Water Area - 0 point

5. Percentage of property in wetland or floodplain for water storage?

Measure this value by estimating the amount of wetlands, the amount of area within the 100-year floodplain of streams, and the volume of water that can be stored.

Results:

- 1 point = none - 10%
- 2 points = 0-10%
- 3 points = 10-20%
- 4 points = 30 - 50%
- 5 points = >50 %

6. Is the property in a Springs Priority Focus Area?

- No = 0 points
- Yes = 5 points

7. Proximity to Other Conservation Lands:

Use Near tool with FNAI Conservation Lands data (euclidean distance)

- Adjacent - 5 points
- Within 2 miles - 3 points
- Outside of 2 miles - 0 points

8. Is the landowner willing to write or contract or already has a management plan in place addressing wildlife habitat value, water, soil and nutrient conservation?

- Yes = 5 Points
- No = 0 Points

9. Does the property contain potential habitat for wildlife?

- Evidence of wildlife or habitat on the property (i.e. gopher tortoise burrows, wetlands, forested areas, natural areas) – 5 points
- Property is strictly used for agriculture with little or no evidence of wildlife habitat – 0 points

Economic Impact Questions

1. Does the farm sell products that are consumed within Alachua or neighboring counties?

- Sold at a local farmers market in or distributed for retail in Alachua County - 5 points
- Goods sold at a regional market - 3 points
- Goods sold at markets outside of Alachua and neighboring counties - 0 points

2. Has the property been ranked or qualify for cost-share acquisition funding through various federal and state easement programs?

- Currently ranked on RFLPP or similar list = 5 points
- Meets eligibility criteria for ACEP-ALE, RCPP, or DEP Springs Acquisition Funding = 4 points
- Land use and size incompatible with easement acquisition matching programs = 0 points

3. Does the landowner purchase feed, equipment, repair services locally?

- Yes = 5 points
- No = 0 points

Social Impact Questions

1. Does the landowner qualify as “historically underserved” or “limited resource”

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/underserved-farmers-ranchers>
<https://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/DeterminationTool.aspx?fyYear=2024>

- Neither - 0 points
- Either Limited resource or historically underserved - 3 points
- Both historically underserved and limited resource - 5 points

2. What is the landowner's involvement in managing the operation and property?

- 0 points = landowner lives outside of Alachua or neighboring counties and property is leased
- 3 points = landowner or family member lives on site but operation is leased
- 5 points = landowner or family member is involved in day to day maintenance and operation of the property

3. Is this an heir's property?

Yes = 5 points

No = 0 points

4. Does the landowner have a clear succession plan or is open to land transfer and access to new farmers?

- Yes = 5 points
- No = 0 points

5. Threat of Development question adapted from ACF Ranking Matrix

Whether there is imminent threat of losing the environmental, social or other values of the property through development and / or lack of sufficient legislative protections (this requires analysis of current land use, zoning, owner intent, location and market conditions) Development Review Completed by EPD-Natural Resources Program Staff:

- 1 = Land is fully protected from development through land use and zoning, easements, regulations, etc, and is not at all appropriate for development.
- 2 = Land is moderately protected from development through land use and zoning, easements, regulations, etc, and is only moderately appropriate for development.
- 3 = Land is not currently protected from development, but is only moderately likely to develop.
- 4 = Land could easily become developable, and is likely to develop in the foreseeable future.
- 5 = Land is already subdivided, or has land use or zoning that allow immediate development, and is likely to develop given market conditions and owner intent.

6. Is there immediate development adjacent to the property? (how is this assessed?)

- Yes = 5 points
- No = 0 Points