

Rural Concerns Advisory Committee Meeting
July 16, 2024
Information for Agenda Item 4.1 –
Update and discussion of Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy

The County Commission has requested input from Rural Concerns Advisory Committee (RCAC) on the development of its Agricultural Land Protection Strategy. For discussion and preparation for providing input to Land Conservation Program staff at the upcoming RCAC August 20th meeting, the following are staff summaries of the recent 6/4/2024 County Commission Special Meeting discussion on “Agricultural Land Protection Strategy – Development Update” ([link to meeting video is here](#)).

Background

The Alachua County Forever (ACF) Program mission is to acquire, improve, and manage environmentally significant lands that protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation. The Alachua County Land Conservation and Management Program 10-year (2023-2032) plan also identified the need for protection of working agricultural lands as a component of the County’s land conservation goals and outlined the process for development of an Agricultural Land Protection Strategy.

In alignment with its mission, the ACF property evaluation process and scoring matrix were developed with an emphasis on protection of environmentally significant lands. To better address the needs for agricultural land protection and the distinct values and services it provides, a framework for evaluation and ranking of agricultural lands, together with funding strategies for acquisition of conservation easements on these lands, is under development.

Discussion Notes

- Recognize the Agricultural Land Protection Strategy is not a comprehensive strategy to protect the local agricultural industry but is one component of County support among others.
- What are the strategic priorities that make this different from the current ACF program?
 1. Sustainability of the local food economy, with emphasis on farm business plans, succession plans, long-term strategy plans.
 2. Protecting water recharge and wildlife.
 3. Protecting agricultural lands from development.
- Consider the County’s balance of grazing and field crops.
- Importance of flexibility for agricultural uses and adaptability to climate change.
 - Florida Statutes 704.06 Conservation easements; creation; acquisition; enforcement: requirements include allowing agricultural activities on conservation easements if such activity is a current or historic use of the land placed under easement.
- Payment for ecological services – opportunities for at least technical support with climate planning, water recharge, open space and tree protection.
- Cost-share easement funding partners – score and rank highly, but not require.
- Recognize challenges associated with keeping advisory board positions filled.
- Request from RCAC:
 - Provide County Commission any economic questions, additional feedback
 - Provide a member on new Agricultural Land Protection Strategy board