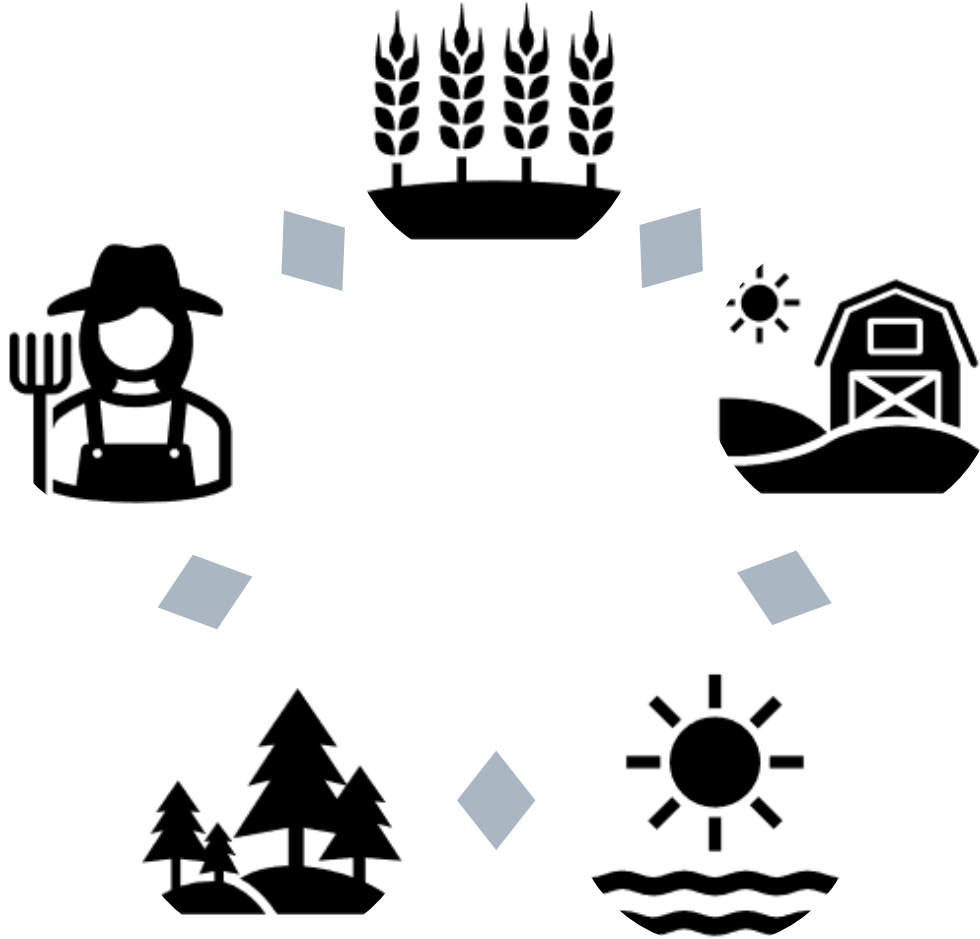


**Alachua County Agricultural Land Protection Strategy  
Summary Report  
Board of County Commissioners Meeting  
September 10th, 2024**



*Prepared with contributions and review from:*

*Alachua County Land Conservation and Management Program and other County staff, Alachua Conservation Trust, Landowners, Stakeholders, Citizens, and Partners*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Alachua County has recognized a need to improve opportunities for protection and conservation of working agricultural lands. Acquisition of agricultural land conservation easements is one strategy available to further the goal of farmland conservation within the county. Easement acquisition can be implemented through the County's existing Land Conservation Program, Alachua County Forever, but a defined process is needed to allow the program to appropriately assess properties, fund agricultural easements, and partner with landowners on protection of their lands. This summary report describes the need, and recommended process and resources to implement an Alachua County Forever Program Agricultural Land Protection Strategy.

## **BACKGROUND: STRATEGY NEEDS AND CONTEXT**

Alachua County, through the Alachua County Forever Program (ACF) has implemented a successful land conservation program for over two decades. The ACF Program was established in 2000 after the Alachua County Forever Bond referendum was approved by the voters of Alachua County. In addition, the program has been approved by voters in three subsequent Wild Spaces and Public Places (local government infrastructure surtax) ballot referenda, in 2008, 2016, and most recently in November 2022. The mission of the Alachua County Forever Program is: *to acquire, improve, and manage environmentally significant lands that protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.*

The Board of County Commissioners, in its 2023 Strategic Guide, identified "Invest in and Protect Our Environment" as a guiding principle, and has named "Continue Wild Spaces and Public Places and include agricultural lands as well" as a program action in support of this principle. Similar to the threats posed to environmentally significant conservation lands, agricultural lands are also under threat from development and other pressures. Since 1950, Alachua County has lost over 46% of its farmland, and much of the remaining agricultural land is at a high risk of conversion to development. Conversion of these agricultural lands impacts local food production networks, remnant wildlife habitat, and increases stormwater runoff, pollutants transported by runoff, and water consumption. Furthermore, much of the remaining agricultural land in the western part of Alachua County contains sandy, high recharge soils, which are essential for the future viability of the Upper Floridan Aquifer that provides fresh drinking water and feeds the springs and rivers contained within Alachua and neighboring counties.

Through action by the Board of County Commissioners during a Special Policy meeting on February 7, 2023, an agricultural land protection strategy has been conceptually included in future land conservation priorities in Alachua County. Agricultural land protection through increased acquisition of conservation easements on agricultural lands, was identified as a complement to the County's geographic-corridor-based land conservation strategy, serving to:

- strengthen existing ACF program priority corridors,
- expand protection of water quality and aquifer recharge,
- enhance protection of local food production systems,
- provide key contributions to pursuit of a 30 X 30 land protection target

The Alachua County Forever program framework and process prioritizes environmentally significant lands for protection of water resources, wildlife habitat, and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation, based on ranked and prioritized program "project areas." This framework includes

protection of some working agricultural lands which meet the ACF program mission due to location, connectivity with existing conservation lands, or other natural resources values. However, protection of agricultural working lands which do not fully meet the threshold of “environmental significance” is not prioritized within the current ACF program structure, or property evaluation matrix and review process. Therefore, successful inclusion of agricultural land protection into the county’s land conservation program requires a separate and defined process developed with agricultural land protection as the focus and with the involvement and input of agricultural landowners and stakeholders.

Agricultural land conservation can be achieved through the purchase of agricultural land conservation easements designed to protect farms from development in perpetuity. Landowners benefit from the option to sell their development rights as opposed to subdividing and developing to non-agricultural uses. Agricultural conservation easements are powerful estate planning tools landowners can utilize to ensure their land and legacy are protected in perpetuity. The sale of an agricultural conservation easement provides funds landowners can utilize to relieve agricultural debt, invest back into the farm and local rural economy, and buy out shared interests in the property. From the public perspective, agricultural land conservation ensures local land is available for farming for future generations, builds climate resilience by retaining land for flood storage and reducing impacts from increased impervious surface runoff, and promotes scenic, open space. In addition, conservation of farmland offers significant community cost savings by avoiding conversion of rural land to residential development.

Traditionally, competitive state and federal easement acquisition programs are utilized to conserve agricultural land in Florida. While County funded agricultural land conservation programs exist within the U.S., a locally funded agricultural land conservation strategy within Alachua County would be a novel approach to supplement existing state and federal efforts in Florida. There are currently unprecedented levels of funding available through federal and state easement acquisition programs for agricultural land conservation. Agricultural land conservation within Alachua County can be maximized through leveraging available federal and state funding partner resources to purchase agricultural conservation easements.

Alachua County’s Climate Vulnerability Analysis (Final Report July 2024) identified the following policy, planning and finance actions recommended to help manage impacts from climate change on agricultural lands, workers, crops and practices:

- **Policy – LAND MANAGEMENT:** Require sustainable land management practices to prevent soil erosion and degradation, preserve agricultural land, reduce water use, protect water quality, and reduce wildfire risk.
- **Planning - LAND USE:** Consider existing land used for agriculture alongside population growth estimates to ensure that rural agricultural land remains protected over time.
- **Finance - LOCAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS:** Develop programs that support consuming agriculture grown locally.

Implementation of an agricultural land conservation strategy will help ensure the diverse landscape of Alachua County is preserved into the future. This is one of the measures Alachua County can use to effectively address the impacts of climate change, mitigate risks, and enhance the quality of life for current and future residents

## **STRATEGY FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT**

The process and guidelines for ACF program implementation were developed through multi-year collaborative and landscape-level review of critical resources needing protection, citizen involvement, and a rigorously defined evaluation, approval, and acquisition process, adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

The general framework for development of an agricultural land protection strategy within Alachua County's land conservation program involves: 1) completion of a study to: identify geographic agricultural land resources, protection priorities, citizen, landowner, and stakeholder involvement structure, land nomination, evaluation, ranking, and acquisition process, 2) authorization of the proposed process by the Board of County Commissioners with recommend budget, staffing, and contractual levels and 3) implementation of the agricultural land protection strategy as a component of and coordinated through the Alachua County Land Conservation and Management Program.

Alachua County contracted Alachua Conservation Trust (ACT), the local not-for-profit land trust ACT under Agreement #13960 (September 2023 through September 2024) to develop a framework for an agricultural land conservation strategy, working in close coordination with and under the direction of the Alachua County Land Conservation and Management Program. The seven project objectives are identified here and recommendations are reviewed in this report:

- **Objective 1:** Create framework for the Alachua County Agricultural Land Conservation Strategy
  - Mission, Conceptual Goals, Ranking Matrix, GIS Model, Resource Inventory, Stakeholder interest/demand
- **Objective 2:** Estimate Scale of Work for Implementation
- **Objective 3:** Establish Framework to constitute Advisory Board
- **Objective 4:** Develop County Process and Draft Resolution Language
- **Objective 5:** Develop framework for matching county resources with regional, state, and federal conservation programs.
- **Objective 6:** Develop an economic impact report for implementation of agricultural land conservation strategy at multiple thresholds levels (e.g. farms/properties, acres, product types, other)
- **Objective 7:** Participate in stakeholder and community engagement and outreach related to proposed agricultural land conservation strategy process and framework. Deliverables for Objective 7 will be implemented throughout project.

The final report for this contract is summarized in this summary report.

## **STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH**

An adaptive, iterative process was used in development of the following recommendations and strategy tools. Landowners were engaged early to contribute to formulation of initial strategy mission, goals, and priorities. Multiple series of stakeholder review and feedback was utilized to revise the strategy mission, goals, ranking matrix, GIS model, staffing recommendations, cost-share analysis, and other strategy implementation components.

**Stakeholder Outreach** Directly Engaged 45 key stakeholders/groups, including 27 Alachua County farmers and agricultural producers. This occurred at a series of fifteen workshops, meetings and charettes; and one-on-one interviews.

- Stakeholder Charette: 11/28/23
- Florida Organic Growers Summit-Farmland Conservation Panel: 4/19/24
- Agritourism Event at SFRR: 5/10/24
- One-on-One Farmer/Working Landowner Interviews and Discussions
- Board of County Commissioners Special Policy meetings: 12/5/23 and 6/4/24
- Land Conservation Board: 4/25/24
- Environmental Protection Advisory Committee: 5/7/24
- Rural Concerns Advisory Committee: 2/20/24, 5/21/24 and 8/20/24
- Joint Water and Climate Policy Board Meeting (County and City of Gainesville) – 6/3/24
- Alachua Soil and Water Conservation District – 6/25/24
- Public Workshop presenting close to final strategy updates: 8/19/24
- BoCC Strategy Report with Implementation Recommendations: 9/10/24

## **STRATEGY MISSION AND CONCEPTUAL GOALS:**

**Mission Statement:** *Increase farmland conservation within the Alachua County through the purchase of agricultural land conservation easements.*

### **Strategy Goals:**

#### **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
- Protect farmland with productive soils

#### **Cultural**

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

#### **Economic**

- Build partnerships between private entities, local, state, and federal governments and protect taxpayer investment by utilizing cost share programs for purchased easements
- Protect rural economy and local agricultural economic networks
- Increase on-farm agricultural viability
- Provide community cost savings by avoiding conversion of rural to residential development through permanent conservation of farmland

## **RECOMMENDED EASEMENT ACQUISITION PROCESS**

An acquisition process for acquiring agricultural easements would follow the general process utilized in the existing Alachua County Forever Program, as defined in Board of County Commissioner Resolution 22-066. The basic steps include: property nomination, confirmed interest of a willing landowner, staff

evaluation of property, citizen review of property (through advisory board), BoCC addition of property to the Active Acquisition List, staff and landowner drafting of easement deed, appraisal, negotiation, contract execution and exercise, contract due diligence (title review, survey, phase 1 environmental site assessment, and baseline documentation report), preparation of easement stewardship plan, closing on the easement, and annual easement monitoring.

The key adjustments in the acquisition process for this proposed Strategy include:

- Utilization of a separate Agricultural Land Ranking Matrix to evaluate agricultural properties nominated to the ACF program
- A new citizen board, the Agricultural Land Conservation Board (ALCB) charged with evaluating and recommending projects to the BOCC for potential acquisition.
- Utilization of an Agricultural Site Evaluation Report (ASER) to compare and evaluate properties, which is presented to the ALCB. The ASER includes the Agricultural Land Ranking Matrix and project summary information.
- The inclusion of three separate categories that organize projects based on potential or secured cost share funding within the Priority Pool:
  1. Projects with Existing Cost Share
  2. Projects Eligible for Additional Cost Share
  3. Projects Not Competitive for Cost Share
  - Projects not eligible for further consideration for public acquisition by Alachua County

A separate BOCC Resolution will be utilized to provide the process guidelines for implementation.

## **PROPERTY EVALUATION DECISION MATRIX AND SCORING CRITERIA**

Many land conservation programs utilize a ranking or scoring component to determine how well properties align with program goals and priorities. The ACF ranking matrix for environmentally significant lands (established in BOCC Resolution 22-066) does not widely accommodate agricultural land values/scoring. Development of a new parallel matrix for agricultural lands was recommended to maintain the continuity of ACF Program and Active Acquisition List for environmentally significant lands.

### **Agricultural Land Decision Matrix**

A decision matrix and scoring criteria were developed based on the Strategies goals. The decision matrix consists of 29 questions, which can be answered using a combination of an initial site visit and desktop review. The decision 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 decision matrix may not justify pursuing one project over another despite receiving an overall higher score. All decision matrix questions are scored to a maximum of 5 points. All decision matrix questions are scored to a maximum of 5 points.

The matrix begins with six general screening questions that receive no score but should be considered by county staff to help evaluate project feasibility. The scored portion of the ranking matrix consists of 23 questions, which can be answered using a combination of an initial site visit and desktop review. The 23 scored questions are organized into the following four categories:

- **Environmental Questions** - This section includes six questions that evaluate a project's ability to meet environmentally significant values such as water, soil, and habitat conservation. This

considers how protecting agricultural land can have added value related to aquifer recharge, flood storage and connectivity to open surface waters. Agricultural lands can also be corridors and help buffer protected spaces and add value for wildlife habitat. Finally, protection of land with productive soils is important for the future of food production and is a priority for farmland protection by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Total environmental points available – 30 points

- **Farm Operation Specific Questions** - Eight questions that evaluate farming operation specific values such as operation type, BMP implementation, and contribution to local economy and food production. Questions related for farm operations also help validate that the land is truly being managed for agricultural production which should be prioritized over other land uses that could be protected under ACF.

Total farm operation points available – 40 points

- **Partner Easement Acquisition Cost-share Questions** - Four questions that evaluate the projects ability to meet partner governmental easement acquisition program priorities and eligibility requirements. Applying to partner matching funds can stretch tax payer dollars and protect agricultural land.

Total partner cost share points available – 20 points

- **Social Impact Questions** - Five questions examine threats to the community and well-being of residents as it relates to losses of rural and productive land. The historically underserved community may also be eligible for greater competitive advantage and higher rates of matching funds in federal agricultural protection programs.

Total social impact points available – 25 points

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 allowing for 115 total points available.

## General Screening Questions

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

- Yes – Project likely not feasible
- No – Project likely feasible

### 2. What is the size of the offered easement acquisition?

- 150 acres – On the larger side of agricultural parcels in Alachua County. May be more competitive for additional easement acquisition cost share funding
- 100 -149 acres – Moderate size.
- 0 - 99 acres – On the smaller side of agricultural parcels in Alachua County. Consider if the project is worth pursuing if it meets other criteria such as if the farm provides substantial value to the community through CSA's, Farmers Market Participation, etc.

### 3. What is the landowners expectation of the acquisition timeline?

- Landowner expects or needs an immediate acquisition – Project is likely not feasible
- Landowner understands conservation easement acquisition is a lengthy process

### 4. What is the ownership structure?

- Single ownership – Typically more feasible to apply for additional government cost share
- Multiple owners with all parties agreeing to an easement – Typically more feasible to apply for additional government programmatic cost share. May be less feasible when applying to federal cost share easement acquisition programs due to FSA eligibility requirements.
- Multiple owners not in agreement to pursuing a conservation easement – project likely not feasible

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

- Yes – Project is typically more feasible to pursue
- No – Project likely not feasible

### 6. Is the property zoned agricultural?

- Yes – Project is likely feasible
- No – Consider how zoning will affect project feasibility

### 7. Does the project meet minimum criteria for conservation easement purchase using surtax funding sources?

- ✓ **The easement is perpetual**
- ✓ **The easement allows for continuation of current or historic agricultural uses**
- ✓ **Activities on easement must be in accordance with BMPs**
- Yes – Project is likely feasible
- No – Project likely not feasible

## Environmental Impact Questions

### 1. 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

**2. 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

**3. 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 %

**4. 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

**5. 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

**6. Does the property contain productive soils as determined through a crop productivity index?**

Crop Productivity Index Scores

- 0 – 0.2 – 0 points
- 0.2 – 0.4 – 2 points
- 0.4 – 0.6 – 3 points
- 0.6 – 0.8 – 4 points
- 0.8 – 1.0 – 5 points

## **Farm Operation Specific Questions**

**7. 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

**8. 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

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

- Yes = 5 points
- No = 0 points

**10. What Percentage of the farm is offered for easement purchase**

- 100% of farm = 5 points
- >90% = 4 points
- Less than 100% of farm = 0 points

### **Farm and Ranch Management**

**11. 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

**12. 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

**13. 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, soil building amendments**

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

**14. 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

### **Partner Easement Acquisition Cost Share Questions**

**15. 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
- Obligated funding from a governmental land acquisition program = 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

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

- Yes - 5 Points
- No - 0 Points or consider referring to ACF

**17. Is the property less than two-thirds forested?**

- Yes = 5 Points
- No = 0 Points or consider referring to ACF

**18. Is the property in a Springs Priority Focus Area?**

- 0 = No
- 5 = Yes

### **Social Impact Questions**

**19. 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
- Limited resource or historically underserved - 3 points
- Both historically underserved and limited resource - 5 points

**20. Is this an heir's property?**

- Yes - 5 points
- No - 0 points

**21. 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

**22. 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 only moderately likely to develop
- 4 = Land could easily become developable, and 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.

**23. Is there immediate development adjacent to the property?**

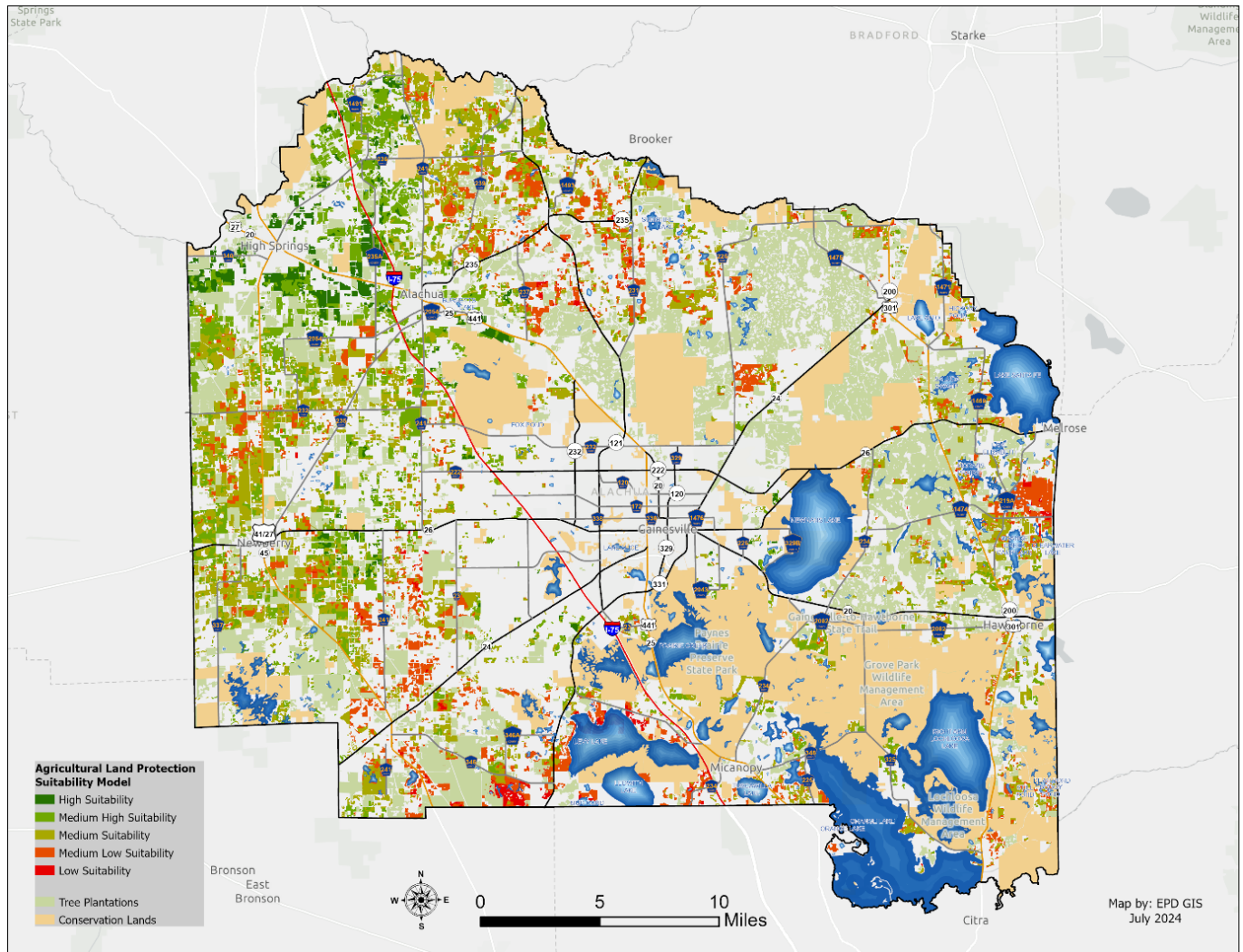
- Yes – 5 points
- No – 0 Points

**GEOGRAPHIC MODEL OF AGRICULTURAL LAND SUITABILITY**

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) models can be utilized to locate areas where priority geographic data overlaps. This is particularly useful when creating a strategy where multiple priorities can be visualized using corresponding geographic data. A GIS Strategic Agricultural Land Conservation Suitability Model was developed to evaluate agricultural lands suitability for conservation within Alachua County. The model takes in eight unique datasets and assigns a suitability value on a scale from 1 to 5 based on dataset criteria. Priority geographic data for the model include groundwater recharge, soil productivity, farm operation type, threat of development, wildlife habitat, and surface watersheds. The model scores agricultural land based on where it overlaps the various priority geographic data. Lands that score high in the model may indicate a greater suitability for agricultural land conservation primarily via an agricultural conservation easement. This is similar in concept to the ACF Project Area Map, except that it will not be used to prioritize larger geographic project areas, but rather general areas in the county most suitable for land protection through this strategy. The model outputs are more significant for big picture strategy guidance than for decision -making on an individual property.

## **8 GIS SUITABILITY MODEL DATA INPUTS**

- #1 Agricultural Land Use Types
- #2 Aquifer Recharge Contribution
- #3 Gopher Tortoise Habitat Suitability
- #4 Proximity to Existing Conservation Lands
- #5 Threat of Development
- #6 Springs Priority Focus Area Protection
- #7 Soil Crop Productivity
- #8 Watershed Protection Contribution



## **FRAMEWORK TO CONSTITUTE STRATEGY CITIZEN BOARD**

Similar to the function of the Land Conservation Board (LCB), it is recommended a separate Citizen Board is created to review nominated and ranked agricultural projects to determine if the proposed acquisition meets County agricultural land protection goals and standards.

**Staff Recommendation:** Constitute a Board of 9 members with a minimum of 5 representing agricultural interests or industry and 4 Citizens at large. Include representatives from the following as applicant pool allows:

1. Agricultural producers
2. Local Food Organization
3. IFAS Representatives
4. . LCB members
5. Rural Concerns Advisory Committee
6. Diverse stakeholders representing county wide municipalities
7. Others? (Student member?)

Both LCB and RCAC members have indicated a separate committee with one overlapping member from each makes sense. And that a similar role in property evaluation to the LCB makes sense as well. Concerns exist about required volunteer time commitment.

### **STAFFING AND CAPACITY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementing an Alachua County Agriculture Land Protection Strategy could require staff skills similar to the ACF program. Individuals implementing this program should be able to communicate with agricultural producers, conservation stakeholders and local, state and federal partners alike. A background or education in and familiarity with agriculture would be preferred. Successful implementation of the Strategy will utilize talent that has knowledge of conservation and agricultural production and working lands, as well as have the skill or ability to learn the process for engaging private landowners and partners to complete land protection transactions, apply for matching sources, negotiate terms of acquisition and execute perpetual protection of agricultural land primarily through purchased conservation easement.

Whether staffed within the County, or through a contractor, it is recommended that at least two full time employees, be hired to implement the Strategy. Acquiring and implementing state and federal programmatic funding project match can be complex and time consuming. If an NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is established to help implement the Strategy, both NRCS and the authors recommend increasing staff and utilizing contractors and subcontractors to meet the requirements of that program. It is important to note that the administrative burden of increased staff capacity is not included in this scale of work estimation.

#### **Basic Needs:**

- 2 FTE positions with office space and support.
- 1 4WD pickup truck
- 2 laptop computers with GIS capability

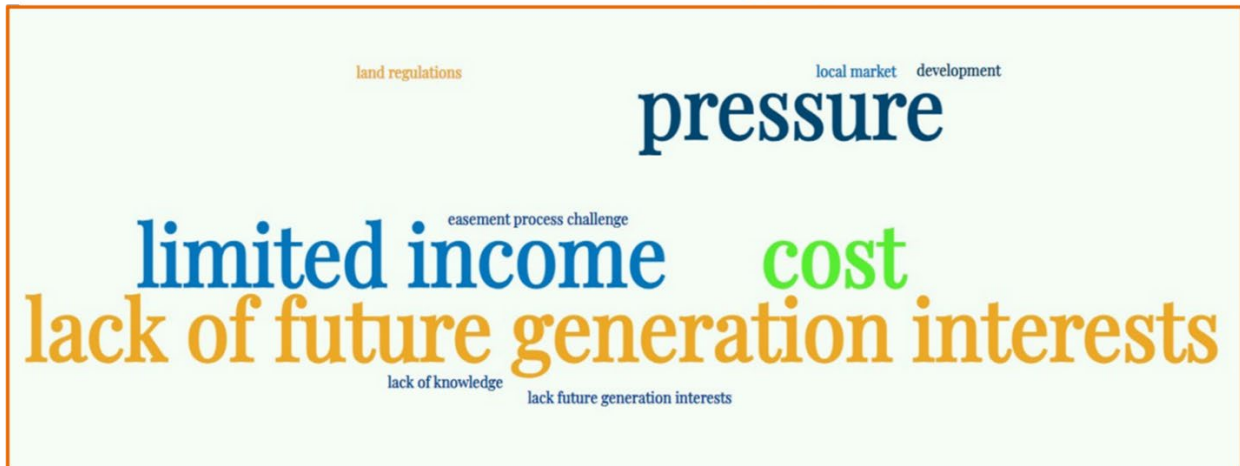
### **FUNDING**

Staff recommends that designated funding for agricultural land conservation easement acquisition be allocated from within the current Board-approved local government infrastructure surtax funding 80% funding split of the Wild Spaces and Public Places half-penny, designated for the land conservation program. Pending Board Direction, and in accordance with the proposed project timeline, implementation may begin in year 3 of the surtax funding cycle, Fiscal Year 2025.

## Why is Protecting Agricultural Land Important?



## What Are Barriers to Protecting Agricultural Land?



## What Concerns Do You Have for the Future of Farming?

