

**Sector Plans** – Florida’s sector planning process provides a way to take a big picture look at a large planning area (5,000 acres or more) and develop a balanced plan that leads to more certain outcomes, thereby benefiting both citizens and landowners. Created at the recommendation of the Commission for a Sustainable South Florida, the sector planning process was designed to be used by fast growing communities to identify the regional resources and facilities they want to protect, areas appropriate for development, and what the preferred urban form should be.

### What Needs to Happen Next

The conference ended with a sense of urgency and a call for leadership. Recommendations need to be acted upon, and fast. In the words of one speaker, “With the number of acres changing hands over the next few years and the growth that keeps coming, we don’t have as much time as we think. We are in a race to the finish.” Changing how we plan for Florida’s rural lands, participants concluded, will require strong public and private leadership, starting with the Governor. The place to start is a long-term, 50-year vision of what we want to protect and the strategies to do just that, for “If, as a state, we do not plan for ag, we cannot expect to keep ag and the natural systems it sustains.”



The November 14, 2006, Florida Land Use Initiative Decision-Makers Forum, *Ag Lands, Development, and the Future of Florida*, is a project of the Florida Earth Foundation (FEF), as part of its mission to bring people together through education, public outreach, and facilitation to ensure the future integrity of Florida’s environment and quality of life. The Florida Earth Foundation is a public-private partnership with over 70 agency, university, industry and nonprofit partners. For more information on the Florida Earth Foundation, please visit our website at [www.floridaearth.org](http://www.floridaearth.org) or contact us at 2005 Vista Parkway, West Palm Beach, Florida 33411, 561-686-3888.

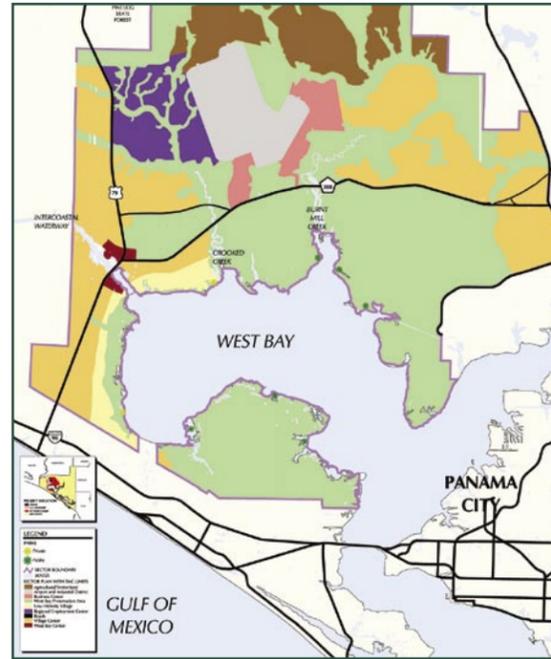
Funding for the November 14 Decision-Makers Forum and this report was provided through the generous support of the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties, the Florida Power and Light Company, Glattig Jackson Kercher Anglin, the Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation, Miller Legg and Associates, the South Florida Water Management District, and WilsonMiller, Inc.



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Elizabeth Ordway Dunn Foundation



The West Bay Sector Plan for 75,000 acres in north-central Bay County established a future land use overlay for the long-range (100-year) growth of the county. Because of planning ahead and looking at the region as a whole, 53 percent of the area is in preservation uses, resulting in the protection of 62.5 square miles of Bay shoreline and watershed.



To be a part of the dialogue about what we want Florida to look like in the next 50 years, join us for a regional forum.

- North Florida, Friday, April 6, Jacksonville
- Central Florida, June 29, Orlando
- South Florida, September 21, Naples

For more information on these regional forums, go to: <http://flui.org>.



## AG LANDS, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE FUTURE OF FLORIDA

Exploring innovative ways of thinking about the use of land, growth management, and stewardship



The big question for Floridians is whether the state’s agricultural lands will be here to enjoy in 50 years. Answering that question was the focus of the November 14, 2006, convening of *Ag Lands, Development, and the Future of Florida*. The state’s agricultural lands are a resource desired by many. For those in farming, the land is the infrastructure they need to go about their business, and for many, it is their principal financial asset. To those in development and many in planning, Florida’s ag lands are the next place to turn to absorb the state’s swelling population, evidenced by the many traditionally agricultural areas where new towns and cities are already coming into existence or being planned. And to those who seek to protect Florida’s natural resources, the state’s ag lands provide multiple environmental benefits, such as the provision of wildlife habitat and water treatment and storage. The challenge to Florida – its local and state leaders and people – is to find new and innovative solutions that will provide space to accommodate the growth that is coming, and present options to ag land owners, while keeping the best of what is loved about rural Florida. To respond to this challenge, the Florida Earth Foundation, through its Florida Land Use Initiative, is engaging Floridians in a series of forums to learn what is happening on the state’s rural lands and how, as a state, we can redefine the way we plan for agriculture and development to ensure that agriculture remains a vital part of Florida’s future.

### Who Attended and Why

The November 14 forum was attended by a cross-section of Florida residents from all areas of the state. The 250-plus participants included rural landowners, architects, educators, elected and appointed officials, planning and zoning board members, environmentalists, engineers, community activists, interested citizens, developers, and land use planners.

**The common bond that drew them together** – The future of a highly valued, at-risk resource: Florida’s ag lands, an economic backbone of the state.

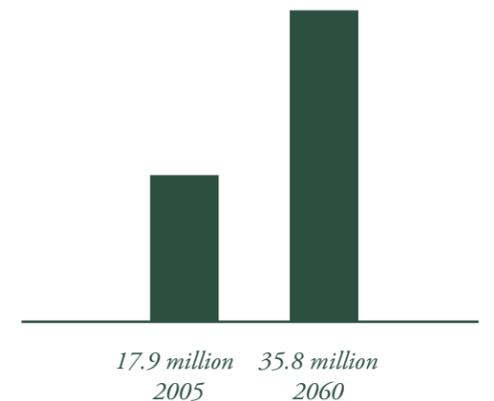
**The reality they saw** – Much of Florida’s ag lands are at the switch point and face a triple whammy: the traditional agricultural economy is weak due to external natural and economic forces; major landholdings are about to change hands because of the age of many farmers; and, as a result of record population growth and current planning practices, urban areas are running out of land for development and are turning to the next frontier – the state’s rural lands. The consequence: ag lands have become more valuable for development than for farming. The problem will only compound over the next 50 years. All signs indicate that we are well on the way to the state’s population doubling by 2060. By 2030, Florida is predicted to be the country’s third most populated state with over 24 million residents.

**The urgent question** – Will current planning practices yield our desired Florida of the future or are new practices needed?

**The answer of those attending the November conference** – If, as a state, we continue with the current planning instructions that result in development spreading out over the countryside, which is happening at a rapid pace, Florida’s ag lands will, for the most part, become a distant memory. To create a different set of instructions, we need innovative planning tools that accommodate growth in a way that development uses less land and large areas of ag lands, along with ag landowner options, are maintained. In this future, agriculture and the countryside are a vital part of the state’s economy and ecosystems and continue to be major contributors to the state’s quality of life.

Florida is a dynamic state that has shown it can deal with the most difficult issues. One of those issues is to stop making incremental, disconnected decisions that diminish the natural and built environments, and start making decisions within the context of a long term vision that clearly contemplates sustaining Florida’s natural and agricultural resources. To do this will require bold leadership, at the state and local levels. *Steve Seibert, Executive Director, Florida Century Commission, and former Secretary, Florida Department of Community Affairs*

### Population Forecast



The two graphics below from 1000 Friends of Florida's *Florida in 2060: Not a pretty picture?* are a dramatic representation of the results of continuing to plan as usual. Without a change in planning practices, much of what is green in Florida today will be converted from rural to urban uses by 2060. The state of Florida, the report notes, clearly "sits at the 'tipping point' related to land consumption for urban development." Therefore, the report concluded, "Without immediate proactive initiatives, the result will be sprawling disconnected subdivisions spread out from coast to coast that surround a few isolated wetlands."

### The Guiding Principles to Keep in Mind

Seven guiding principles emerged for a new way of planning in order to ensure that ag lands remain a significant part of Florida's future.

**Re-order how we plan** – The left-over approach to deciding what is rural does not work. Begin, not end, with a vision for the land that should be protected for agricultural and natural uses (our green infrastructure) and how. The current process – allowing what is rural to be the land that is left over after the development is planned – will not result in viable agriculture or natural systems. After deciding what to protect and how to do it, plan great communities of place that are good neighbors to rural lands and maintain their value and livability over time.

**Start with the larger, longer-term view** – If viable connected systems of natural lands and working agriculture are to be created, individual land use decisions need to be made within the context of their cumulative impact on the long-term (50-year) vision for the regional landscape. The general view: "We can no longer afford incremental, parcel-by-parcel or DRI-by-DRI decisions that, in the end, will chop up the land to the point that ag or natural systems are no longer viable."

**Listen to the land** – The unique characteristics of the land should dictate planning strategies and how they should be tailored to fit the individual profile and ownership of the land, recognizing that it often comprises the largest part of a farmer's portfolio. The reasons for land conservation will vary in different areas of Florida.

**A single-solution-fits-all approach does not work** – State and local governments need a basket of tools to choose from when planning for ag lands. Different kinds of agriculture and land ownership will require different policies in different combinations. A wide array of policies (incentive-, rather than penalty-based) should address the appropriate location and character of development and how it relates to agriculture and natural systems.

**Public-private partnerships are part of the future** – Recognize that there will not be enough public money to protect Florida's ag lands. Land has become too valuable, and buying it all would not be possible. Therefore, a fully-funded Florida Forever program should be linked to public-private partnerships with landowners that use the market value created by development to preserve what is important.

**No longer give away free density** – The day of giving away free density is over, which means that additional density should be approved only when broader benefits, such as conserving farmland and natural systems, accrue to the community. When converting rural land to urban densities, the additional density can be used as leverage to encourage the public-private partnerships we need to protect more land.

We must all work together to find new ways to accommodate growth while keeping Florida the special place it has been. Each of us has a stake in protecting our quality of life. We owe it to our children and future generations of Floridians. *Tim Jackson, President, Glatting Jackson, and Vice President, 1000 Friends of Florida*



(These images were produced with the permission of 1000 Friends of Florida, from their December 2006 report, *Florida 2060: Not a pretty picture?*)

**Support strong leadership and create a larger table** – Turning around how we plan for Florida's rural lands will require strong public and private leadership working in tandem, and a larger table set to find common ground solutions that all interests view as fair and balanced. Participants agreed: "You need to have those who are impacted by a decision at the table." For Florida's ag lands, the table should include ag landowners, environmentalists, developers, realtors, planners, local elected officials, and citizen groups. Good boundary crossers (those who think beyond their own interests to see the bigger picture – the forest as well as the trees) should also be at the table.

### What Are the New Solutions?

The most frequently mentioned planning strategies grew out of the guiding principles: market-based solutions that use the development associated with growth to protect rural lands and vision-based solutions that enable communities to look at individual development proposals within a longer-term, broader systems context.

#### Market-Based Solutions

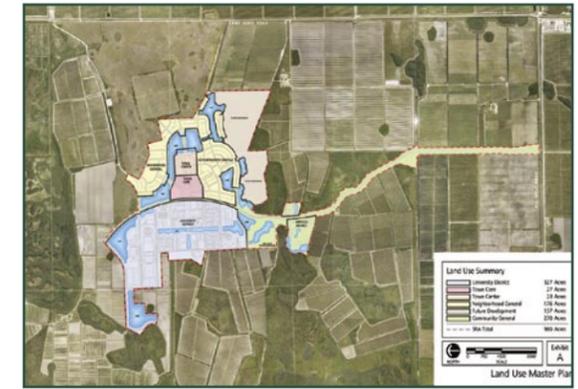
**Florida's Rural Lands Stewardship Program (RLSP)** – The RLSP directs development to suitable locations within rural areas and protects important ecosystems and habitat while maintaining the economic value of the land. It does that by transferring land-based rights through stewardship credits from sending areas designated for natural and agricultural resource protection to receiving areas designated for development. The stewardship credits are based on the natural resource value of the land, with the number of credits driven by the environmental land characteristics most valued by the public.

**Purchase and Transfer of Development Rights (PDR and TDR)** – PDR and TDR programs enable landowners to remove development rights from the land to be protected and, in exchange, receive compensation. In a PDR program, the landowner sells a conservation easement to a qualified private conservation organization (usually a land trust) or a governmental agency. In a TDR program (which works in a local government planning system that does not give away density), the landowner is compensated by a private developer who transfers the development rights from the landowner's land to another site, usually in a designated growth area that is an appropriate location for development and has full public services.

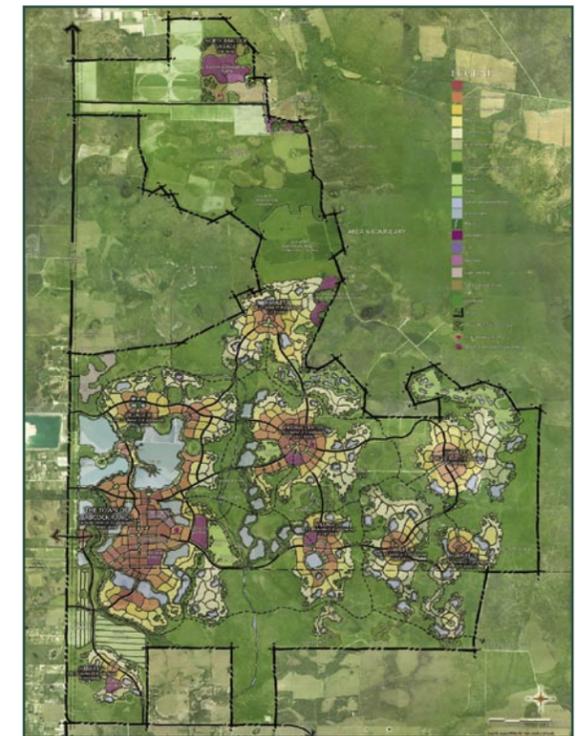
**Economic Incentives for Agriculture** – Maintaining ag lands means putting policies in place to help farmers remain profitable, as continuing to farm must make sense financially. One such policy is green payments, which can provide another source of income in addition to crops. The program compensates farmers for the environmental services, provided by their land, that a government has to pay for in some way (for example, stormwater attenuation and treatment and provision of wildlife habitat and open space). Hillsborough County is doing that with its Agriculture Stewardship Program, the newest initiative of the county's agriculture industry economic development program.

#### Vision-Based, Larger-View, Longer-Term Planning Solutions

**Conservation Development** – Conservation (sometimes called open space) development is used when a landowner or developer wants to preserve open space and protect the natural features of the land but still retain the right to develop. To do this, a significant portion (usually 50 percent or more) of a site is set aside as permanently protected open space, and the development is concentrated (or clustered) on a portion of the land, using smaller lots to accommodate the development on less space, thus providing multiple environmental and economic benefits.



Collier County used the Rural Lands Stewardship Program to reduce the development footprint by enabling compact, mixed-use, sustainable communities and, without using public funds, protect highly-valued natural resources and farmland through market-based incentives.



The owners of the 91,000-acre Babcock Ranch in southwest Florida used a variety of tools, including Florida Forever funds and a conservation development planning approach, to ensure that important environmental resources and farmland were protected in perpetuity. As a result, 80 percent of the ranch will be preserved, and the development footprint is reduced to 18,000 acres.