

Minutes
Sustainable Agriculture EAR Comp Plan Meeting
Sarasota Agriculture Policy Council
March 31, 2005
Twin Lakes Park

In attendance

Cliff Coddington (Longino Ranch, Inc.), Lisa Eisen (NRCS), Carolyn Gregov (Extension), Mike Huff (Jessica's Farm Stand), Jodi John (Sustainable Sarasota), Robert Kluson (Extension), Buster Longino (Longino Ranch, Inc.), Laura Morton (RC&D), Bill Fischer (Jessica's Farm Stand), Nina Powers (Sustainable Sarasota), Olga Ronay (Kimley-Horn).

Purpose for the meeting

Sarasota County must update its Comp Plan every seven years. The County uses the Evaluation Appraisal Report (EAR) tool to do this. The County is currently undergoing the Evaluation Appraisal Report process for the next update. This committee has come together to take advantage of the EAR process to provide input to the county planners on sustainable agriculture. The planners want an over-all broad vision for agriculture in Sarasota County, and they will put that vision into the appropriate sections of the Comp Plan. Robert Kluson, new Extension Agriculture Agent, will present the Committee recommendations to the county planners. Examples of issues the planners are seeking information about and solutions for include potentially volatile ones like controlled burns, farm noises, and composting odors.

Background

The Sarasota 2050 Plan is supportive of agriculture in the future land use outside the urban service area of the county. The Plan

- Establishes an Agriculture Reserve Area
- Identifies the greenways
- Develops a plan instead of allowing growth by sprawl
- Has a Village Plan for 50-60% open space
- Has low-intensity agriculture (agriculture that doesn't impact residential uses)
- Makes it the responsibility of the developer, not agriculture, to keep the buffer zone
- Protects the right for controlled burning

Issues to consider

- Open spaces as buffers
- Provide incentives for farmers to put in buffers.
- We need to pass a Farmland Trust Program.
- Do we level the playing field – put everybody on equal footing about how many units can be built?

- How do we create and support additional opportunities in agriculture?
- What is “viable agriculture”?
- How many acres does it take to create a sustainable farm, based on the science of natural resources like water, soil, etc.?
- Sustainable Agriculture must apply to large producers as well as small producers.
- You can’t dictate all BMPs for farmers – we need to paint broad brush strokes.
- Sustainable Agriculture must be tied to reducing the Ecological Footprint.
- Is this area of Florida a prime place to grow, considering our resources?
- Do we need to take a stand on genetically-modified food crops, organics, pollution impacts?
- Could water be “reserved” for agriculture, become an incentive for the development of agriculture?
- Could another incentive be produce-bearing gardens in front yards – cheaper water if you do this?
- One of the most profitable crops is sod. Have a Farm Crew come to your front yard instead of a Lawn Crew? Incentivize front yard gardens to reduce demand for sod?
- Farms don’t have to be protected if they’re profitable.
- Do a Sustainable Agriculture Resolution.
- Need a Community Food Systems Analysis completed.
- Identify other production practices (such as composting) that need to be protected

Barriers to agriculture in Sarasota County

- Farmers must be able to import raw materials for composting.
- Some crops demand more resources than others. More adapted crops that are profitable need to be identified.
- Need long-term commitments from consumers like school district’s lunch program. Meat buying co-ops?
- Need 365-days-a-year supply of a crop to keep customers.
- Primary message needs to reach people that food will get more expensive: oil, water.
- Problem with Farm Stand Issue.
- Disasters make agriculture risky – write protections into the policy.
- We need to address finding land. We need access to land, a financial commitment from the county. The county needs to set aside land and identify funding sources. Maybe a one cent tax incentive? Two years ago Commissioner Jon Thaxton proposed TDRs (i.e., transfer of development rights).
- Address affordable housing. How can workers afford to live in our county? We can’t have profitable farms without workers.
- Zoning laws of density on rural acres don’t allow for housing needed for farmers and workers.
- Better public transportation must be provided for farm workers.

Opportunities for agriculture in Sarasota County

- How do other countries deal with their food needs?
- Eliminate the middle man to increase profit.
- Develop niche markets.
- Piggy-back on “Florida Fresh”.
- Put together various stakeholders in the agriculture community.
- Need to develop a local brand marketing strategy, such as “Southwest Florida Produced”?
- Develop cooperative and regional efforts in agricultural production among Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, Desoto?
- The Florida Department of Agriculture will fund a branding project.
- Cooking shows can promote locally-grown foods.
- Different commodity producer groups like Cattlemen’s Association, Produce Commodities, etc. could help.
- Inventory our resources, barriers and opportunities.
- SCOPE is talking about doing a Community Food Assessment.
- Horse farms need to be part of the plan, also growing crops for biofuel, like sunflowers and grasses.
- Focus on the economic impact.
- Start with small, manageable pieces.
- There is a 50% match available through the USDA Farmlands Protection Program. Replicate Manatee County’s actions of establish county’s eligibility for this match.
- There is also the possible State of Florida funding for the “Rural and Family Lands Protection Act” of 2001 – unfunded for several years but now before the legislature again.
- Get Lisa Carlton or her staff on our committee.
- There is money available federally under the Homeland Protection Act that is targeted for food security purposes, such as the promotion of local production
- Should we call our Committee the Sarasota Agriculture Policy Council instead of the Sarasota Food Policy Council?

Thoughts from Planner Olga Ronay

- The Comp Plan is only the beginning of our journey. Zoning and land regulations are where the rubber hits the road, makes it happen.
- The idea of incentives is the only way to go.
- Partnerships are key – ESLPP Program, Parks and Rec, etc.
- Small scale agriculture integrated into existing neighborhoods – a certain number of lots could be aggregated for Community Gardens.
- Create incentives for water for sustainable uses.
- Equity of Land Value – can we use ESL model, provide money to farmers to keep lands in conservation?
- Congress for New Urbanism in California: 1/3 ESL, 1/3 Ag, 1/3 development. Use local schools and grow what schools need.

- Explore possibilities like Longino Ranch producing “whole food certified” foods for Whole Foods, hormone-free beef products, etc.
- Do a survey on the need.

Action Steps:

- 1. We will call this committee the Sarasota Agriculture Policy Council.**
- 2. Carolyn and Robert will summarize today’s proceedings and send to all Council members by April 7.**
- 3. Council Members will provide feedback to Robert by April 14. Feedback should include the Council Member’s thoughts and vision about agriculture in Sarasota County in the coming years, what it should look like, what needs to be written in the Plan to make that happen, etc. Feedback should also identify additional Council members, if needed, and agriculture partners.**
- 4. Robert will present the Council’s vision to county planners by May 1.**
- 5. Robert and Carolyn will write a Vision Statement that can be used by Council Members for marketing and public relations purposes.**
- 6. Next Council meeting will be held Monday, April 25, 9:00 am at the Sarasota County Extension, 6700 Clark Road. Robert will present the draft Council vision.**
- 7. The Council will have a booth at E-fest.**