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# Partnership News

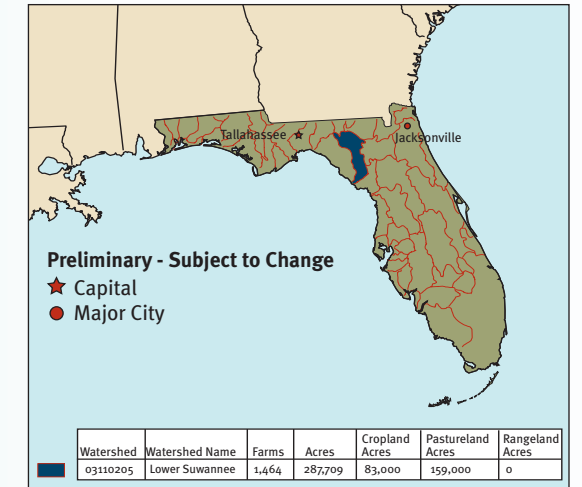
Suwannee River Partnership

## Farmers Could be Eligible for New USDA Program

The Lower Suwannee Watershed has been selected for the USDA's newest program – the Conservation Security Program (CSP). This voluntary program is designed to financially reward farmers, ranchers, and growers who are actively working to conserve natural resources on their private lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture, and range land – as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation. “CSP gives us the opportunity to reward those working conservationists who are trying to do leading-edge conservation, going beyond the minimum of the regulation and really trying to reach for the stars in terms of what you can do with conservation,” explains NRCS Chief Bruce Knight.

The Lower Suwannee Watershed which extends from roughly Live Oak south to the mouth of the Suwannee is the only watershed to be selected in Florida this year. The program, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, is designed to rotate through watersheds in a state to reward farmers doing a good job in the area of conservation. The program provides equitable access to benefits for all

### Florida Selected CSP Watersheds



Source: NRCS

producers, regardless of size of operation, crops produced, or geographic location.

USDA-NRCS held public meetings in January and sign-up dates have not yet been set. For more information contact your local USDA-NRCS office. Also stay up to date at the Partnership's website at [www.mysuwanneeriver.com](http://www.mysuwanneeriver.com).

## MFLs: Tool for Future water use planning



Audiences in Jasper, Lake Butler and Chiefland were introduced to Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs), and what they will mean for the future of local rivers and springs, at a series of kickoff meetings held in late November and early December, 2004.

The purpose of the meetings was to provide an overview and schedule for establishment of MFLs for the Alapaha, Santa Fe, Waccasassa and Lower Suwannee rivers and springs.

MFLs are the water levels and flows set to prevent significant harm to water resources. Required by Florida Statutes, MFLs also will have an impact on water-permitting decisions.

“MFLs are a tool for water use planning and regulation,” explains District Executive Director Jerry Scarborough.

Faced with burgeoning growth and water consumption statewide, the district is on a fast track to set MFLs for most water bodies by 2008.

More information regarding MFLs is available at [www.mysuwanneeriver.com](http://www.mysuwanneeriver.com).

## Suwannee River Partnership

### MEMBERS

- Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Chair)
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Florida Department of Health
- Florida Department of Community Affairs
- Suwannee River Water Management District
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
- U.S. Geological Survey, Water Resources Division
- Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University's Center for Water Quality
- University of Florida, Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences
- Florida Rural Water Association
- Suwannee River Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.
- Gold Kist, Inc.
- Sunshine State Milk Producers
- Florida Farm Bureau Federation
- Florida Cattlemen's Association
- Florida Fertilizer and Agrichemical Association
- Florida Forestry Association

- Florida Poultry Federation, Inc.
- Florida Onsite Wastewater Association
- Nestlé Waters of North America
- PCS Phosphate
- Coca-Cola Dannon
- The following Soil and Water Conservation Districts:  
Alachua, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Santa Fe, Suwannee
- The following County Commissions:  
Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Suwannee, Union
- The following Cities and Towns:  
Alachua, Bell, Fanning Springs, High Springs, Lake City, Newberry, Starke, Trenton
- Adopt-A-River  
Santa Fe Springs Working Group

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For more information see <http://www.mysuwanneeriver.com>



**JERRY SCARBOROUGH**  
Executive Director,  
Suwannee River Water Management District

## PARTNER'S PERSPECTIVE

With the start of each new year comes the temptation to reflect, with pride and satisfaction, on the successes of the past. Let's resist that temptation.

The Suwannee River Partnership got off to a great start, but the race is far from over. We're in a long-distance relay, not a sprint, and the ground we cover stretches from the Gulf coast into central Georgia. Surely we'll need the participation of the multitudes living within our watershed if we hope to win this race.

When we first noticed a trend toward higher nitrate levels in rivers and springs, we knew we were facing a problem that took years to develop, and would take years to reverse. Focusing our attention and resources on one potential source – agriculture – we worked first with dairies and then with poultry producers to develop and implement animal-waste Best Management Practices (BMPs) that would lead to cleaner water in the future.

Now, hay and row crop farmers are coming on board and the Partnership is helping them to develop resource-friendly conservation plans and BMPs for fertilizing and irrigating their crops.

The Partnership is, and always will be, dedicated to promoting and rewarding environmental stewardship in the agriculture community. This year, one of our priorities will be to promote more efficient agricultural irrigation and more accurate water-use reporting methods.

Yet, as we see the face of our region changing, we

also know it's time to cast a wider net, to attract a broader cross-section of partners who can bring fresh ideas, resources and vigor to our well-established program. UF/IFAS Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program is one of our valued new partners, and we hope other similar programs will join us in reaching out to non-agricultural interests.

The way we use water, the way we apply fertilizers and chemicals, and the way we dispose of various types of waste are key issues for everyone, not just agriculture. As residential and commercial development in rural North Florida expands, so must our efforts to inform and educate all citizens of their roles and responsibilities in protecting our vast watershed.

If we hope to succeed in preserving our water resources for future generations, we must engage local governments, landowners, businesses and industries, and ordinary citizens in the process.

And then there's the matter of money. State and federal cost-share programs provided the financial infusions necessary to keep our agricultural BMP programs alive. Now we must seek funding sources to help balance out the program in other areas.

Since its beginning in 1999, the Suwannee River Partnership has been trying to make up for lost time and our goal in 2005 and beyond should be to stay ahead of the curve.

With our hands to the plow, and not looking back, let's run, with urgency, the race set before us.

## What is a Watershed?

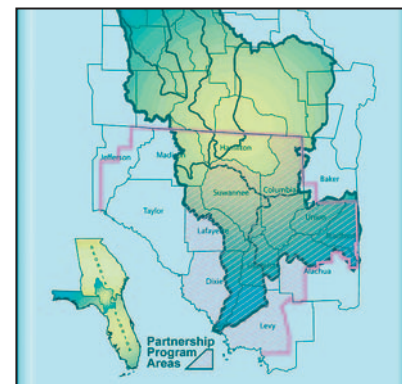
We often hear the term watershed in discussions regarding water quality and water areas, but what does that term mean and include?

The technical definition of a watershed is a land area whose runoff drains into any stream, river, lake, or ocean. Basically speaking, all land areas are part of a watershed.

Watersheds have many functions. Some functions are hydrologic and others are ecologic. However, human activities have an effect on all the functions of a watershed.

The Suwannee River basin watersheds cover 7,640 square miles in north central Florida. The water supply in the watersheds is sufficient to meet current and projected demand; however, demand is increasing due to population, industrial and agricultural growth.

Protection of water, land and vegetation requires preventative measures that can be achieved through watershed planning and watershed stewardship programs. The Suwannee River Partnership is actively working to aid all people living in the Suwannee and Santa Fe Basins to voluntarily use Best Management Practices (BMPs) and become stewards of the watershed. Through research, education, outreach programs — involving all the stakeholders, the



Partnership has been able to apply the best resources available to make the process effective and accessible for the agricultural and natural resource industries in the Suwannee and Santa Fe River basins.

## UF/IFAS Extension Aids Vegetable Growers in adopting BMPs

UF/IFAS county extension agents and specialists have been working with Suwannee and Santa Fe River basin vegetable growers who have used plastic mulch and drip irrigation since the technology was introduced to the region in the late 1980s. The continuing goal is to refine and improve effectiveness. The continuing emphasis is on improving the efficiency of water and nutrient management.

To accomplish this, county extension agents and specialists have coordinated several projects out of the North Florida Research and Education Center—Suwannee Valley under the leadership of Bob Hochmuth, multi-county extension agent, and Eric Simonne, vegetable specialist. All of these projects first demonstrate the new technology at the Center during field days and workshops, then follow through by demonstrating that same technology on grower's fields in the region.

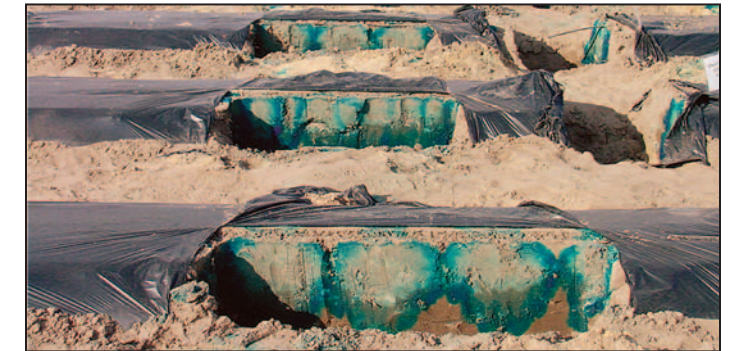
Programs have included demonstrating soil moisture sensors, the initiation of the Florida Drip Irrigation School, plant nutrient status testing and the most recent — and, perhaps most popular, demonstration — the use of blue dye injected into the irrigation system.

Soil moisture sensing devices can help growers determine *when* to irrigate and *for how long*. That's how growers learned they are likely to *overwater* in the first month of the season and *underwater* thereafter. The change in early season overwatering habits is important due to the great risk of leaching nutrients during this period. Growers in the program all adopted changes in their early season irrigation management based on the information from these soil moisture sensors. The total season water volume was changed very little. But, the improved irrigation efficiency early in the season reduced fertilizer applications.

A specific Extension program to help continue to educate growers on water and nutrient management issues is the Florida Drip Irrigation School. The first school was held at the North Florida Research and Education Center-Suwannee Valley in 2001 and later adopted throughout the state. The school provides intensive hands-on training for growers learning to better manage their drip irrigation systems for the delivery of water and fertilizer.

Today, plant nutrient status can be determined in the field by squeezing plant sap onto a ion selective meter that measures either nitrogen or potassium. This gives the grower an instant result to guide their fertilizer program from week to week. These ion-selective meters have been used and demonstrated in the area during the last 10 years. As a result, over 75% of the area's watermelon acreage has benefited from this program.

The most recent demonstration being taken to farms is the use of blue-dye injections into an irrigation system to monitor how quickly the water moves downward in the soil in their field. This was taken to three growers in 2004 after demonstrations at the North Florida Research and Education Center-Suwannee Valley in 2001-2003. The blue dye makes it easier to see the wetting pattern under the drip



tape. After the blue-dye injection, holes are dug under the plant beds to measure how far the water and nutrients have moved in a specific amount of time.

When growers see and learn on their own farms, they often serve as early adopters and helping teach their peers. It is through innovative projects and practices such as these that the BMP process will continue to be effective and accessible for the agriculture and natural resource industries in the Suwannee and Santa Fe River basins.

[Bob Hochmuth, multi-county extension agent, NFREC-Suwannee Valley; Eric Simonne, vegetable specialist, Horticultural Sciences Department]

## Jimmy Cheek is UF's Sr. Vice President for Agricultural and Natural Resources

GAINESVILLE, Fla.—Jimmy Cheek, dean of the University of Florida's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, has been named the university's senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources, UF President Bernie Machen announced recently. The appointment was effective January 1, 2005.

As senior vice president, Cheek will administer UF programs in food, agriculture, natural resources and life sciences. He will be the administrative head of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, (IFAS), which encompasses five major units: the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences; the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station; the Florida Cooperative Extension Service; the School of Forest Resources and Conservation; and elements of the College of Veterinary Medicine.

"The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has a proud history of excellence in serving Florida's agriculture and natural resources through teaching, research and extension," Cheek said. "I am honored by President Machen's support and look forward to working with him as well as IFAS stakeholders, students, faculty, and staff."

### Dates to Remember

General legislative session begins in Tallahassee, **March 8, 2005.**