



Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

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DATE

TO: Hillsborough County Administration
ATTN OF: Tom Fesler, County Financial officer
Kevin Brickey, Director, Management and Budget
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Dear Sirs -

Per Commissioner Boles' memo of June 3rd, please accept this report of the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District's (the "Conservation District") budget performance for the period FY 2024 through FY 2026. Commissioner Boles also asked for some explanation of our relationships with other agencies, both State and local, in consideration of potential redundancies in mission or opportunities for efficiency.

The Conservation District has not made a presentation to the Board of County Commission (BOCC) for a budget workshop in an unknown number of years. Additionally, my understanding is that the BOCC was approving the district's budget without being engaged by either the Board Chair or the executive director for several years prior to our submittal for Fiscal Year 2025.

The Conservation District exists as a special district of the State, with statutory authorities and responsibilities provided under Florida Statutes Title XXXV, Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry, Chapter 582, Soil and Water Conservation Act. The Florida Soil and Water Conservation Act (originally enacted in 1937 as the Soil Conservation Act) was enacted in reciprocity to the Federal Soil Conservation Act of 1935. The federal act created funding of technical services to agricultural producers for the purpose of protecting the capacity of soils to produce crops over the long term, under the long-standing premise that national security is dependent on agricultural security. The Conservation Districts of all 50 states are recognized by reference under the Code of the Federal Register as the local sponsors for federal funds and technical services provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS").

When the Florida Soil Conservation Act was originally adopted, the Boards of the conservation districts had the authority to impose non-ad valorem tax assessments on their constituents to pay for local water infrastructure projects and technical services. Agriculture was still widely and evenly distributed throughout Hillsborough County, with urban development occurring in small clusters. As urban development escalated throughout the State, the need to manage large water infrastructure systems culminated in the creation of the five regional water management districts in the 1960s; the conservation districts lost their non-ad valorem taxing authorities in that time frame.

Although the conservation districts lost control of their funding, the need for technical services to agricultural producers continues to be a critical ongoing issue, including here in Hillsborough County. Florida is one of the top agricultural producing states in the nation, is the highest producer of watermelons, and either 10th or 11th for beef cattle production. Hillsborough County itself is 3rd in the nation for strawberry production, and 3rd in the State for overall agricultural impact. In spite of Hillsborough County's urbanization, it continues to be in the top 20 counties in the nation for overall agricultural impact as well. That impact on the Hillsborough County economy is estimated to be greater than \$1.4 billion per year. It needs to be said that this impact is largely free to the larger economy in that agricultural lands contribute a disproportionate share to the ad valorem tax base in comparison to the services these lands receive back.

As of 2026, Hillsborough County Property Appraiser reports that Hillsborough County has nearly 81,000 acres of agricultural land on the tax rolls (Table 1). Most of those lands are concentrated in County Commission District 4, in the Hillsborough and Alafia River basins and in the Little Manatee River basin. A smaller portion of agricultural lands persist in the Old Tampa Bay watershed, in a band stretching northward from Town & Country to the Odessa/Keystone area. Most of the contiguous lands in the Hillsborough and Alafia basins provide a free-to-the-public service as water recharge areas and as compatible use buffers between development pressure and public conservation areas.

Table 1: Hillsborough County's Agricultural Acres by Commodity/Land Cover

Commodity	Acres
Pasture	57,755
Strawberries	14,443
Cropland	4,870
Timber	2,772
Orange Grove	1,086
TOTAL Acres Greenbelt	80,926

However, these lands also are in Basin Management Action Plan areas ("BMAPs") created under rule by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The BMAP areas are adopted by FDEP rulemaking for water bodies that are already identified as "impaired". While the Hillsborough River has been under a BMAP for a long time, the entirety of the Alafia River was only adopted under its BMAP in 2025. All constituents within the BMAP areas, including agricultural land operators, are subject to rules created to improve water quality conditions for human health, recreation and fish and wildlife resources. Hillsborough County and its three municipalities enforce rules on development and industrial activities, within their respective Urban Service Areas, to meet their water quality certifications under the State and Federal requirements. However, agricultural producers and land operators have certain exemptions under

state statute from the requirements imposed on municipal and industrial entities. These statutory exemptions create the workspace within which the Conservation Districts interact with agricultural producers, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), and the Hillsborough County Environmental Protection Commission (the EPC). The degree to which each of these environmental and agricultural agencies engage with Hillsborough County agricultural sector is determined by a mix of regulatory sideboards, funding capacity and perceived trustworthiness.

The Conservation District began a realignment in 2024 to meet legislative mandates, but this also gave us the opportunity to look for gaps in service between our major partners and the rural working lands community. What follows is an agency-by-agency critique of services to the agricultural base in Hillsborough County and then a year-by-year perspective of the Conservation District's efforts to meet gaps in service to rural landowners and operators.

FDACS - The FDACS is responsible for creating the technical manuals for Agricultural Best Management Practices ("Ag-BMPs"), which producers are supposed to apply to their land operations toward meeting their own compliance requirements under the BMAP rules. Enforcement of participation in the Ag-BMPs is resource limited, so the FDACS uses a tiered approach based on income. Higher income farms are in a "must-do" category, and lower income farms are in a catch-as-catch can category with the emphasis being on voluntary enrollment. The SWFWMD and the Conservation Districts each have roles in the bottom-up management of enrollments. In addition to cost-share dollars, the SWFWMD has capacity for enforcement through their water use permits for agriculture. The conservation districts' role is in advocacy, education and up until recently, contract management of pass-through funds. The conservation districts had responsibility for due diligence to ensure practices were completed before reimbursement funds were released. Technical services at the county-level also were cooperatively funded between FDACS and conservation districts. Frequently the local share was met by counties and municipalities via inter-local agreements with their respective conservation districts.

Until 2024, the FDACS provided \$150,000 in total per year on a pass-through basis to the Conservation District to be distributed as reimbursements to agricultural producers for land and water management improvements. The last pass-through contract expired on June 30th, 2024. In 2024, the same year that the Conservation District's Board started realigning its operations back toward agriculture, the FDACS made a strategic choice to restructure their cost share programs, emphasizing large regionally-significant projects at the expense of awards to small farms. While the Conservation District lost a modest administrative fee for handling the pass-through funds, which amounted to a few thousand dollars per year, the bigger problem is the loss of FDACS sponsorship of Hillsborough County growers to implement AG-BMPs. To be clear, FDACS had not been providing any financial support to the Conservation District for technical staffing since at least 2018.

US Dept of Agriculture/Natural Resource Conservation Service ("NRCS") – the NRCS is one of the Conservation District's three partners that are recognized by law (NRCS, FDACS, Cooperative Extension Service). The Conservation Districts throughout the nation are recognized as the local sponsors of NRCS activities under the Code of the Federal Register. Although the NRCS is allowed to deliver services to agricultural areas where conservation districts do not exist, the NRCS' services are delivered more effectively where conservation districts have healthy relationships with their local agricultural

communities. In most states the conservation districts are the more powerful partner in the relationship, by organizing local community interactions and delivering educational programs to rural land operators.

The NRCS had difficulty in delivering services in Hillsborough County under the Conservation District's status quo conditions through FY 2023. The Board of Supervisors' negotiations with the NRCS for a cooperatively funded agricultural technician position did not conclude in time to meet the County's budget approval timelines for FY 2025 and in December 2024, the NRCS Plant City Office lost all three of its conservation planning staff. The Conservation District had already recognized the need for it to step forward in securing capacity for technical services by January 2024, hence why we asked the County Administration for a budget increase for FY 2025.

Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension Service ("Extension Service") – The Extension Service is recognized as a cooperating partner to the conservation districts under Chapter 582. The Extension Service is funded cooperatively by Hillsborough County and by the State through the University of Florida system. The University funding stream means that the Extensive Service is more directly subject to legislative budget controls than are the conservation districts. Although we do not have records to support this assertion, it is likely that the Hillsborough County BOCC chose to fund the Conservation District directly because the Chapter 582 provision for interlocal agreements was easier to operate and offered the County more certainty for services.

The Extension Service's technical knowledge is recognized as an essential aspect of the relationship with the Conservation District. In fact, input to the Conservation District's Strategic Plan by the Extension Service in 2024 and 2025, was critical to determining the niche within which the Conservation District could operate without creating redundancies. There are several Hillsborough County extension agents who deliver specific types of consulting to the commercial agriculture sector, encompassing plant health and business practices toward optimizing on economic outputs. There also is an Agricultural Economic Development Consultant, fully funded by BOCC, who networks to recruit new agricultural businesses to the County, supports recruitment and retention of transitioning military veterans into the agricultural work force, facilitates the Agriculture Economic Development Council, and provides service to zoning. None of these staff have natural resource-conservation planning in their job descriptions or annual work plans.

SWFWMD - The SWFWMD shares responsibility [with FDACS] for promoting the AG-BMP requirements, but in addition to voluntary cost-shares, it also has capacity for enforcement through its water use permits. The SWFWMD prefers to pay for tangible assets that "you can put your hands on" such as irrigation control devices. Their services are delivered through the FARMS and Mini-Farms programs to farmers as a "pie-slice," deferring to FDACS funding for works such as excavation of livestock ponds, ditches, etc. This Conservation District has found the SWFWMD staff to be the more efficient in terms of service to Hillsborough County producers of the three cost-share funding partners. The SWFWMD offers no cooperative funding to conservation districts; it delivers cost-shares direct to the producer; has its own technical services staff and delivers service throughout its sixteen counties without consideration for equity between counties. It is important to understand that cost-share awards are capped on a per-project, per-property, and per-lifetime (to the property owner) basis.

The SWFWMD suffers a cultural distrust among agricultural producers due to its taxing and regulatory authorities. Whether the political heads of SWFWMD want to acknowledge this obstacle or not, SWFWMD staff regularly acknowledge it as a practical issue in reaching local growers. Our interaction

with local producers points out that our identity as a local non-regulatory technical service provider must be established up front as distinct from the SWFWMD. From thereon, we can provide consultations without antagonism, advocate for SWFWMD's FARMS and MiniFarms programs and make referrals to the SWFWMD for service. Please note that at the same time that the BOCC is considering what services it will have to cut if the property tax referendum is passed, the staff at the water management districts also are concerned that their voluntary agricultural programs will be defunded.

Hillsborough County Public Utilities Administration – There are three major work units in Public Utilities that engage with landowners to varying degrees. Briefly, the Water Resources Department delivers potable water and sewer services to residential users, with only a few instances of providing services outside of the Urban Service Area. This department does not engage with agricultural land operators on natural resource issues. The Solid Waste Department collects non-hazardous solid waste from customers throughout the County where property lines are accessible to commercial trucks. Rural property owners take care of their own yard waste and agricultural operators are responsible for managing biological waste on their own. Code Enforcement gets involved with rural property owners on a limited basis, mostly limited to frontage on public rights-of-way.

Environmental Services Division - The Environmental Services Division has relevant subject matter expertise that the Conservation District engages directly with in a decision support role. Environmental Services has a partnership with the Hillsborough County EPC to monitor surface water quality throughout Hillsborough County including in rural areas at publicly accessible points of discharge. However, neither the EPC nor Environmental Services have direct access to agricultural property owners to discuss the potential for operational improvements that would benefit surface water quality; that role falls within the purview of the Conservation District.

In 2024, the Environmental Services Division and the Conservation District each recognized the opportunity to leverage the roles of the other. The Conservation District now regularly engages with Environmental Services staff for decision-support information in the form of water quality data interpretation and in turn provides a forum for Environmental Services to speak to our constituents through our Board of Supervisor meetings and annual Local Working Group.

HC-Environmental Protection Commission (HC-EPC) – The EPC's primary tool for interacting with agricultural property owners is a delegation from FDEP and Hillsborough County's wetland protection rule, Chapter 1-11, which recognizes the State's exemptions for bona fide agricultural practices. The EPC and the Conservation District signed a Letter of Understanding in 1989, which respects their mutually exclusive roles. Consequently, the EPC steers clear of consulting with agricultural interests except in cases of wetlands delineations for publicly funded engineering projects.

Hillsborough County Public Works – Facilitating the connection of agricultural properties to local stormwater management systems was a core function of the Conservation District's program when it was organized in 1946. When the Conservation District's Board hired me in late 2023, I brought a background of consulting with four of the five water management districts as well as a few local drainage districts with me. At that time, the Board identified an expectation that the Conservation District would engage with SWFWMD and the County as an advocate for more assistance to rural property owners on stormwater management and disaster response issues. One aspect that I recognized quickly was the lack of local basin drainage districts in Hillsborough County and throughout SWFWMD. Local basin drainage districts,

funded by non-ad valorem tax assessments, are ubiquitous throughout the St. John's River- and South Florida Water Management Districts. I have reached out to Hillsborough County Public Works to advocate for a more robust system and reinvestment in the existing surface water management infrastructure, I serve on the Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group and on SWFWMD's Agriculture and Green Infrastructure Advisory Committee as a voice for Hillsborough County's rural working lands.

Hillsborough County Conservation and Environmental Lands Management Division (CELM) – The CELM does not have subject matter expertise in the management of agricultural commodities, cover crops or irrigation systems for agricultural uses. Also, as with the SWFWMD, there is a certain distrust of the CELM among rural landowners, because of the County's taxing authority. However, CELM's expertise, and mission, in the management of natural areas, synergizes well with the Conservation District's mission. The CELM recently stepped into contracting conservation easements for natural resource protection on private lands. This budding conservation easement program is one activity that local agricultural stakeholders suggested could benefit from the Conservation District's advocacy and is the basis on which the Conservation District and CELM leadership are exploring our working relationship. Lastly, a memorandum of understanding between Plant City and the Conservation District is in the works to update the conservation element of the McIntosh Preserve, and Conservation District staff are coordinating information flow from CELM for the project.

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District Baseline Financial Conditions through FY 2024 Conservation operations and technical positions have been variably funded by the FDACS, NRCS and Hillsborough County throughout the years. However, neither the FDACS nor the NRCS has cooperatively funded technical positions in the Tampa Bay region for quite some time.

Until 2020, office space and computer access were provided by the NRCS on an unfunded cooperative agreement. When COVID sequestration went into effect in 2020, the Conservation District lost its office and computer access, and no new agreement was made to return the conservation district's staff to those working conditions after sequestration was lifted. From that point through the beginning of FY 2024, the Conservation District barely operated as a public entity, having no office space for customer walk-ins, and no dedicated phone line, computers, email addresses nor even a website for customer service.

Hillsborough County has been funding Conservation District staff positions since at least the 1970s with the oldest continuous position being our administrative specialist. The last time that Hillsborough County was fully funding a technical position was in 2014 ("Engineering Technician"). Between 2015 through 2024, Hillsborough County fully funded the executive director and administrative specialist and provided a county-owned vehicle and a small expense budget. Otherwise, the Conservation District ran fundraising events to support small financial awards to 4-H, Future Farmers of America students and various citizen conservation projects.

Conservation District's Baseline Performance Fiscal Year 2024

In 2023 and 2024, new statutory requirements created a demand that all of Florida's 40+ conservation districts allocate time and resources toward fact-finding, realignment and strategic planning with statutory deadlines occurring in 2025. In addition, the requirement that the boards of supervisors be bona fide agricultural producers drove out all institutional knowledge of this Conservation District's activities in 2023. As a result, the Fiscal Year 2024 budget was approved by the BOCC as a status quo repeat of 2023.

Please refer to Tables 2 and 3 in consideration of the Conservation District's performance over the period FY 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Table 2: Budget Performance for Period 2024-2026

Fiscal Year	Personnel		Operating		Capital		Total	
	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	Actual
2024	\$ 304,983	\$ 260,288	\$ 73,967	\$ 35,823	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 378,950	\$ 296,111
2025	\$ 366,654	\$ 227,911	\$ 83,885	\$ 44,086	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 450,539	\$ 271,997
2026	\$ 492,114	\$ 164,776	\$ 127,589	\$ 54,227	\$ 45,000	\$ -	\$ 664,703	\$ 219,004
FY 2026 Actuals are Year-to-Date								

Table 3: Growth in Customer Service (Period 2023 – 2026)

Customer Service Contacts by Type	2023	2024	2025	2026
Facebook Views	0	418	17,985	15,749
Webpage Views	14,307	226,082	624,499	619,179
Webpage Followers	0	42	314	481
Webpage Inquiries	2	20	15	13
Walk-Ins/Phone Calls	0	5	33	10
Referrals from Partners	0	1	11	8
Consultations	0	6	10	3
Property/Site Visits		4	5	2
Collaboration in USDA Cost Share Contracts	0	0	0	21
Referrals to Partners for Further Assistance		6	11	1
Technical Deliverables and Committees	1	1	8	*11

At the beginning of 2024, the Board of Supervisors turned to County Administration for help in recruiting a new executive director with a background in both natural resources management and in government administration. I arrived in December 2023, and the Board of Supervisors directed me to treat Fiscal Year 2024 as a “reset button” with high urgency. When the Board and I articulated the vision of the Conservation District returning to its agricultural and technical services roots, two part-time staff members left voluntarily. We have operated without any additional technical capacity beyond my own until FY 2026. Hence, an important aspect of judging the district's technical performance needs to account for its capacity to do work.

As previously mentioned, the Conservation District finished FY 2023 barely operating as a public entity, having no office space for customer walk-ins, no published phone number and its staff operating without

business email addresses. At the beginning of FY 2024, the Conservation District got its website, County email addresses, computers and spending authorizations in place. By the end of FY 2024, we:

- completed three financial audits and an OPPAGA review (Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability).
- backfilled missing public records and converted 10 years of paper records for digital public access.
- handled twenty-five (25) customer service inquiries, received six (6) referrals for consultations with property owners, conducted four (4) property visits as part of those consultations, and connected all (6) customers to the most appropriate partner agencies for further assistance.
- hosted the annual NRCS Local Working Group (technical deliverables).
- collaborated with NRCS, the Cooperative Extension Service, SWFWMD, CELM, Human Resources and Management & Budget to identify appropriate knowledge, skills, abilities and compensations for delivering technical services in an agricultural context.
- engaged with the major agricultural trade groups in Hillsborough County to determine what “value-added services” meant to them.

Initially, we worked with the NRCS and Hillsborough County toward converting a part-time unskilled labor position to a 50/50 cooperatively funded technical position for FY 2025. Just prior to the County’s budget submittal deadline, the NRCS acknowledged they would not be able to meet the proposed 50/50 cost share. Consequently, we requested that Hillsborough County fully fund the conversion of that position into one FTE technical position and for operating expense to support use of the office facility at 4503 Coronet Road. Otherwise, we worked with the County to adjust the executive director and administrative specialist jobs to better reflect the competencies and accountabilities necessary to manage an independent government agency in the Sunshine. Lastly, we converted one County-supported part-time position into a permanent offering of college internship in agricultural leadership with no additional financial impact on the County’s budget.

Conservation District’s Fiscal Year 2025 Performance

The Conservation District’s outreach campaign and newly established public accessibility drove growth in customer service for FY 2025. Customer service for the year included:

- Handling forty-eight (48) customer service inquiries; receiving eleven (11) referrals for assistance from partners and elected officials; conducting ten (10) consultations, which included five (5) property visits; and connecting all (11) customers to the most appropriate partner agencies for further service.

Technical deliverables included paper products, technical events and committee work as follows:

- Hosting the annual NRCS Local Working Group
- Hosting seminar on the 2025 Alafia River BMAP rule
- Hosting UF agricultural college intern’s research project
- NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee
- [Hillsborough] Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group
- Publishing our strategic plan supported by performance metrics
- Presentations and surveys at agricultural trade- and land conservation conferences

In 2024, the OPPAGA conducted reviews of the three previous years' performance (FY 2021, 2022, 2023) for each of Florida's 40+ conservation districts. The OPPAGA cited the lack of strategic plans and associated performance metrics for all conservation districts, and subsequently, the State Legislature mandated the publication of strategic plans for all conservation districts to occur in Fiscal Year 2025. Therefore, the creation of the [Hillsborough] conservation district's strategic plan became a state-mandated work plan output for that year.

In addition to the lack of a strategic plan, the OPPAGA also cited leadership instability as a systemic problem for [Hillsborough] Conservation District's board of supervisors and the executive director position. The Conservation District's strategic plan tackles the leadership problem through its priorities, which direct the board's business, governance and stakeholder engagement practices, as well as the technical aspects of the conservation district's legislative purpose. Partner and Stakeholder input identified the following technical activities as underserved in the Hillsborough agricultural community:

- "Conservation Planning" services for rural working lands
- Lack of communication between NRCS and customers of the federal cost-share programs
- Leadership development opportunities for emerging agricultural professionals
- Advocacy with respect to surface water policy and stormwater infrastructure development
- Advocacy for contiguous areas of agricultural working lands/compatible land use areas
- Advocacy for Public-Private Partnerships (i.e. conservation easement programs)
- Availability/affordability of certain pieces of farm equipment on a rental basis
- Education events specific to emerging farming technologies, techniques and regulatory issues

The Conservation District's pursuit of County funding for technical staffing targets the missing capacity for conservation planning on rural working lands and the lack of communications with NRCS cost share programs. Also, the Conservation District's technical positions are structured to address the leadership development challenge that was identified by Hillsborough County agricultural leaders and UF educators.

The District's committee and stakeholder engagements focus on the interplay between natural resources management on private lands, the long-term sustainability of agriculture against the backdrop of climate change, and on the role that land use and infrastructure planning and management have in supporting the agricultural economic sector.

Lastly, in response to federal spending reductions, the Conservation District provided secure storage of NRCS' trailered field equipment, which deployed for field duties from our location throughout 2025.

Conservation District's Fiscal Year 2026 Performance

The Conservation District expanded its services to its partners and the local community consistent with these Strategic Plan Priorities:

- Stakeholder Outreach
- Support Industry Resilience through Policy and Advocacy
- Collaborative Partnerships
- Agricultural Leadership Development and Retention
- Increase Technical Services (both Quality and Quantity)
- Community Communication, Education and Engagement

At halfway through FY 2026 the Conservation District is trending toward a 100% increase in customer service inquiries with outputs as follows:

- Handling twenty-three (23) customer service inquiries; receiving eight (8) referrals for assistance from partners and elected officials; conducting three (3) consultations, which included two (2) property visits; and resulting in one (1) customer being referred to the most appropriate partner agency(s) for further service.

Technical deliverables now include in-kind project work with NRCS as well as paper products, technical events and committee work including:

- In-kind collaborative work on 21 NRCS cost-share contracts
- Appointment to SWFWMD's Agriculture and Green Industries Advisory Committee
- Lake Thonotosassa Surface Water Improvement Management (SWIM) Plan
- In-Kind technical contributions to the Plant City McIntosh Preserve Conservation Plan
- [Hillsborough] Local Mitigation Strategy Working Group
- NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee
- Hosting the annual NRCS Local Working Group
- Hosting UF agricultural college intern
- Hosting a Public Forum on serving Public Office under Chapter 582
- Perennial Peanut/Livestock Forage demonstration project
- Technical Writeup on Perennial Peanut as an Alternative Forage for Horses

The District's stakeholder engagements expanded to include a donation campaign for farm equipment, and increased communication with locally elected officials and government departments on behalf of the agricultural landowner constituency. The Conservation District is desirous of establishing inter-local agreements that enable the district's staff to augment the field operations of the County Office of Emergency Management and the County's Conservation and Environmental Lands Management Division (CELM).

Lastly, in addition to continuing to provide secure storage of NRCS' trailered field equipment, the Conservation District provided temporary office space to its NRCS partner in FY 2026.

Concluding Remarks

The Conservation District's management humbly asks that the Board of County Commission consider the following thoughts. With the loss of work capacity coming from FDACS and NRCS to the local area, the Conservation District is one of only two agencies that the County invests in to deliver services to agricultural producers (the other being the Cooperative Extension Service).

The Conservation District is not asking for any adjustments to the \$563,869 line item that was presented in 2025 and approved concurrent with Fiscal Year 2026 funding. Based on the estimated economic impact of agriculture on the Hillsborough County economy, this budget request represents 14 cents per acre investment in the long-term viability of Hillsborough County's roughly 81,000 acres of agricultural land. This 14-cent return on investment does not account for the inestimable free public services that agricultural lands provide to the public as water recharge area, floodwater storage capacity for suburban areas, air quality management and compatible land use buffers for publicly owned conservation land.