

**Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District  
Meeting of the Board of Supervisors**

**May 18, 2026**

**Location: HSWCD Office / 4503 Coronet Road, Plant City, FL 33566**

**Board Supervisors in attendance:** Terri Parke (Seat 1); Betty Jo Tompkins (Seat 2); Gretchen Hoke (Seat 3); Casey Simmons Runkles (Seat 4); Matt Shivers (Seat 5).

**Staff Support:** Dr Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager); Kye Chapman (Conservation Specialist); Michael Mingari (HCBOCC IT Service Delivery Manager); Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez (*virtually, via teams*); Chrisanna Tew (HCBOCC Senior Manager IT Service Manager, *virtually, via teams*).

**Item 1-4 Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance/ Introductions:** Chair Parke called the meeting to order at 10:00 am and led the Pledge of Allegiance; Vice Chair Hoke led the prayer; Chair Parke welcomed attendees and asked for introductions.

**Partner Agency and Vendor Representation in Attendance:** *In person:* Andrew Kearse (USDA/NRCS – District Conservationist); Simon Bolin (Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AEDC; *virtually, via teams*); Ken Griner (SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS; *virtually, via teams*); Jeff Whealton (SWFWMD – Agricultural Programs Manager; *virtually via teams*); Troy Green (Hillsborough County Environmental – Water Quality Issues; *virtually, via teams*); Alessandra Rowe (SWFWMD – Agriculture Team Engineer; *virtually via teams*); Monica Petrella (Hillsborough County Food System Program Coordinator; *virtually via teams*).

**Public in Attendance:** . William Cook – LemonGraft, LLC; Harold Fry (cattle producer); Joshua Young (organic farmer and AEA Fertilizer LLC); Ramkrishnan Balasubrama and Sebastian Interlandi (Florida Organic Growers, Inc): *virtually via teams*; Raelynn Burr; *virtually via teams*

**Item 5. Public Comment:** None requested at this meeting.

**Item 6 Public Correspondence:** None received since previous board meeting.

**Item 7 Review and Approval of Agenda:** Chair Parke motioned to accept the agenda; Supervisor Tompkins 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion; motion carried 5-0.

**Item 8 Minutes of the April 20th Regular Board:** Dawn Chancey presented the draft minutes for the April 20th, 2026, Board meeting; Supervisor Runkles made a Motion to accept the meeting minutes; Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion. Motion carried 5-0.

**Item 9 Financial Report for April 2026:**

Dawn Chancey presented the April 2026 Financial Report. Vice-Chair Hoke noted that she had reviewed the draft report with Dawn prior to the meeting and expressed satisfaction that the organization is in the process of changing banks.

Dawn Chancey reported that the organization was waiting on one remaining check to clear at South State Bank before fully closing the accounts and transferring all funds to Bank of Tampa.

Staff reviewed the SouthState accounts in anticipation of closing them and discovered two additional fraudulent charges in the main checking account since the previous fraudulent charge; staff requested South State Bank freeze both accounts. Dr. Walsh closed the SouthState “capital assets” account (\$1000 balance) and drew down the core account, leaving \$200 toward reconciling the two fraudulent charges; funds were deposited to two accounts with Bank of Tampa on the same day; when the two fraudulent charges were reconciled by SouthState, the remaining funds were withdrawn and deposited to the core account at Bank of Tampa.

Chair Parke called for a motion to accept the financial report for April, 2026. Supervisor Hoke made the motion to accept the financial report; Supervisor Runkles 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion; Motion carried 5-0.

**Item 10 Partner Agency Reports:**

- *USDA/NRCS, District Conservationist Andrew Kearse* provided as detailed activity report as follows:
  - EQIP Assessment (application) - 14 applications have ranked for cost share awards.
  - FY2026 CSP – South Florida confirming met 100% CSP ranking timeline 5/15/2026

- Field visits are in progress with 51 contracts being prepared for cover crops and 2 contracts pending cancellation
- NRCS/Hillsborough/Pinellas Local Working Group held on 5/4/2026
  - 18 attendees
  - 2 guest speakers: Ken Griner – SWFWMD and Matt Warren – FDACS.
  - Resource Concerns tabulated by Kye Chapman, with Top Ten Resource Concerns as follows:
    1. Water Quality – Ground water depletion
    2. Plant Health – Plant pest pressure
    3. Water Quality – Inefficient irrigation water use
    4. Plant Health – Plant productivity/and or health
    5. Terrestrial habitat – Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates
    6. Water Quality – Ponding and flooding
    7. Livestock Health – Feed and forage balance
    8. Water Quality – Nutrients transported to surface water
    9. Soil Health – Subsidence
    10. Tie between
      - a. Soil erosion – Bank erosion from streams, shorelines or water conveyance channels
      - b. Water Quality – Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to surface water.
- *FDACS – OAWP Environmental Consultant – Vanessa Bauzo*: Vanessa had no major updates at the moment. The current OAWP director, West Gregory is leaving the organization with his last day being May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026. Jessica Ferris will serve as the acting interim director for the next 90 days. Jessica currently leads the regional projects and some Board members likely have seen her presentation at other venues. The annual report is coming soon; expected around June or July, and it will include statewide BMP enrollment numbers.

- *SWFWMD – Agricultural Programs Manager – Jeff Whealton:* Jeff reported
  - The current Ag-Swim contract with the NRCS is approaching the end of its renewal cycle and will expire in its current form; the new contract routing and drafting process normally begins before expiration; however with current staffing freezes, budget constraints and delays from within NRCS, the program is experiencing a backlog. As a result, it is unlikely that the AgSwim contract will be restarted for the upcoming fiscal year. There may be a one-year gap without AgSwim contract coverage. The anticipated coverage gap is not expected to create significant issues. During this period, NRCS can provide engineering services directly to farmers as needed. The AgSwim exemption review process will continue to operate. An alternate vendor is available to support smaller projects, particularly those involving approximately 40-50 acres.
  - Current operations are proceeding well overall. Staff continue to receive a high volume of exemption verification requests from a variety of agricultural activities, including Cattle Ponds, Pre-processing facilities and other farm related projects.
- *SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS – Ken Griner:*
  - Ken offered a summary of the SWFWMD-FARMS program, highlighting their favorite cost-share items such as irrigation system weather stations and moisture probes. They also contribute to tubular recovery ponds, the pump stations, pump filters, and the main line that goes out to the manifolds. They currently have a lot of strawberry projects under funding. As always, if anyone knows of someone wanting to participate in FARMS cost-shares, please send them Ken's contact information.
- *Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AECD/Cooperative Extension Service – Simon Bolin:*
  - Urban Expansion meetings are taking place. Next meeting is scheduled for June 10th. This meeting is virtual.
  - Spring Hops Field Day is scheduled for June 2nd

**Item 11. LemonGraft LLC Presentation - William Cook** – William’s family is from the Hardy area in Polk County, and were primarily involved with citrus—mostly Valencia oranges.

William grew up in and around a number of different places, but he was not directly involved in agriculture. His background is actually in architecture and early-stage community design. In a way, that background brought him full circle back to agriculture because food touches everything (food security aspect of community design). It influences how we live, how we design communities, how we interact physically, and how we connect socially.

That realization ultimately led to him and several fellow community design students to create LemonGraft and shaped what we hoped to see happen in our communities—especially around agriculture. We wanted to help people reconnect with food systems and improve access to better food.

LemonGraft is a relatively new and small company. They have officially been around for about four years, although they were working on the concept long before that. They ended up launching a little sooner than planned because COVID and the pandemic freed up their time to do so.

Their work originally focused on sustainable community design, but they struggled to find a missing piece that connected all the elements they cared about. Food ultimately became that missing piece.

By the time the pandemic began, they had already done a significant amount of research on what this idea could look like and how it might work. But when supply chains started breaking down and people struggled to access food, it became clear just how vulnerable our systems were.

People were trying to figure out how to meet basic needs and get food to their families. Even communities located right next to farms faced the same challenge. Being adjacent to agricultural land didn’t necessarily mean people had access to the food being grown there.

That raised an important question: How do they actually connect communities to the food system?

In response, they pushed this idea forward and have been developing it ever since.

**Item 12. Florida Organic Growers Presentation:** Ramkrishnan Balasubramanian explained the mission of Florida Organic Growers (FOG) and its role in strengthening local food systems by connecting growers and consumers.

FOG focuses on serving two primary groups:

1. Growers

- Organic farmers
- Sustainable growers
- Regenerative growers
- The organization supported regenerative agricultural practices long before the term "regenerative agriculture" became widely used.

2. Consumers

- Individuals seeking access to local and sustainably produced food.
- FOG works to connect consumers directly with local food systems and initiatives.

Local Food System Work

- FOG's core mission is to bridge the gap between producers and consumers.
- The organization supports local food initiatives that strengthen community access to locally grown food.

Principal Programs

1. Certification Program

- One of the largest organic certification programs in the United States.
- Operates across multiple states and in 19 countries.
- Provides:
  - Organic certification
  - Food safety certification

2. Education and Outreach Program

- Conducts educational activities for both farmers and consumers.
- Promotes awareness of sustainable and organic agriculture.
- Supports training, outreach, and community engagement efforts.

### 3. Policy and Advocacy Program

- Engages in agricultural and food policy initiatives.
- Has achieved several policy successes supporting growers and local food systems.

#### Key Takeaway

FOG strengthens local food systems by supporting growers, educating stakeholders, advocating for policy improvements, and helping consumers connect with locally produced food.

RAM concluded by inviting the Board to further explore opportunities to collaborate with FOG. (*\*\*note - later in the meeting he specifically asked for a post-meeting connection with Supervisor Tompkins, based on her previous experiences in marketing organic products*)

#### **Item 13: Supervisor Announcements:**

##### **Chair Parke:**

- Attended Soil and Water Conservation District Candidate Forum.
- Attended ribbon cutting at Solaris to see the project that the Plant City Leadership Group completed.
- Attended the NRCS Local Working Group meeting.
- Attended 2 days at the FSGA AgriTech Trade Show.
- Attended the Plant City Chamber Networking Luncheon to hear Jason Conrad speak.
- Attended the Plant City Chambers Leadership Graduation for Dr. Walsh's graduation from the program.

### **Supervisor Hoke:**

- Attended the County's ELAPP advisory meeting related to conservation land acquisition and protection efforts within Hillsborough County;
- Participated in the Hillsborough County Greenways & Trails Subcommittee meeting and discussions regarding connectivity, conservation, recreation, and public engagement opportunities; (*\*\*anticipates being appointed to this committee as a voting member.*)
- Advocated for continued funding support for Florida Forever and the Rural & Family Lands Protection Program through outreach to state and federal leadership, including Commissioner Wilton Simpson, Senator Ashley Moody, Representative Lawrence McClure, Senator Danny Burgess, and others.
- Attended the Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area Advisory Group meeting representing Rain Frog Ranch and participating in discussions related to conservation management, wildlife corridor connectivity, public recreation, and equestrian stewardship opportunities.
- Participated in the Highlands County Landowner Assistance Expo hosted by the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District.
- Continued outreach and collaboration efforts related to conservation, working lands, wildlife corridors, agriculture, and public engagement opportunities throughout the region.

### **Supervisor Tompkins:**

- Exhibitor on conservation at Brandon-Riverview Chamber of Commerce non-profit luncheon.
- Attended Soil and Water Conservation District Public Candidate Forum
- Participated in two NACD Conservation coffees.
- Attended commemorative tree planting at Moseley Homestead for Arbor Day.
- Participated in NRCS Local Working Group meeting.

- Exhibitor with conservation display at 25<sup>th</sup> annual EPC Clear Air Fair in downtown Tampa.
- Attendee for both days and multiple educational seminars at FSGA AgriTech Trade show.
- Participated in Hillsborough County Fair Board meeting, Executive Board and special meeting and presented plans for conservation exhibits in 2026 Fair.
- Conducted work with Rotary Brandon South Eco Club and Hillsborough County 4-H Foundation.
- Continued distribution of Florida Conservation Coalition mini-grants to schools, youth groups and individuals to conduct conservation projects.

#### **Supervisor Runkles:**

- Attended the NRCS Local Working Group
- Attended the FSGA Agri-Tech Trade show.
- Attended Soil and Water Conservation District Political Forum
- Attended the Plant City Chamber Network Luncheon to hear Jason Conrad (HC Florida Cattlemen Association and FL Beef Council) speak.

#### **Supervisor Shivers:**

- Attended the Local Working Group
- Attended the FSGA Agri-Tech Trade show.
- Attended Soil and Water Conservation District Political Forum
- Attended the Plant City Chamber Network Luncheon to hear Jason Conrad speak.

#### **Item 14. Executive Director's Report:** Dr. Walsh reported:

- Farm Equipment Fundraising Campaign Update: Stumped at the Hillsborough County Cattlemen's Dinner for the campaign and surveyed the audience for preference on equipment; a total of 27 survey responses were received:
  - 17 responses favored purchasing a cattle chute.

- 10 responses favored purchasing a no-till drill.
- No inquiries or commitments for donations have been received to date.
- Board members were encouraged to actively promote the campaign and seek donations.
- Dr Walsh noted that he had observed that ag community members have demonstrated willingness to spend significant amounts on fundraising activities, and similar support is needed to invest in agricultural resources that will benefit the community long-term.
- Staff are implementing digital QR codes for donations responses.

#### A. Equipment Cost Update

- The cost of the Arrowquip cattle chute has decreased by several thousand dollars and is now estimated at ~\$13-14,000.
- The cost of the no-till drill has increased but remains under \$20,000.
- No minimum fundraising threshold was established before moving forward, but current equipment pricing was reviewed.

#### B. Office Painting Project

- Interior and exterior painting has been completed.
- Exterior work was finalized on Friday afternoon.
- Board members expressed satisfaction with the improvements.
- The updated exterior color scheme aligns with the organization's branding format (sage green being the primary color).

#### C. Hiring and Staffing Updates

- Introduction of Conservation Technician - Kye Chapman joined the organization less than one month ago. Kye has quickly assumed leadership on several projects and already is working with Plant City staff to scope our contribution to the City's McIntosh Preserve Master Plan - Conservation

Element. Due to limited staffing resources at the City, the city appears to be welcoming our assistance in updating the management plan.

- Land Conservation Specialist Position: with the recent vacancy of this position, Dr. Walsh is revisiting the hiring process with Hillsborough County Human Resources as soon as possible.
- Agricultural Public Policy and Communications Intern: An employment offer has been extended to a newly enrolled UF master's student in the Soils and Natural Resources Management program. The situation is designed to support this student, like a fellowship, consisting of part-time employment (20 hours per week) while duly enrolled in their master's degree.

#### 4. Additional Announcements

- Supervisors are reminded of their election-related filing requirements and deadlines.
- Individuals affected were advised to contact the Supervisor of Elections to ensure compliance.

#### **Item 15: Upcoming Events:**

- July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026 – Annual Financial Disclosure Form Due:  
<https://ethics.state.fl.us/FinancialDisclosure>
- July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting
- August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting

Meeting Adjourned at 12:03 pm.