AGRICULTURE & RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and rural communities are woven into the fabric of Florida, shaping its landscape, economy, and way of life. Working farms and ranches sustain local economies, while small towns and close-knit communities define much of the state beyond its urban centers. Rural Florida remains vital to the state's identity and future. FAC recognizes that rural and agricultural counties face distinct responsibilities and realities shaped by land, tradition, geography, policy, and growth. A strong Florida depends on strong rural communities, and FAC is committed to ensuring their voices and needs remain central to the state's future.

AGRICULTURE

A. Agricultural Viability, Stewardship, and Local Authority: Florida's agricultural industry represents a substantial share of the state's economy and shapes the character of its rural communities. FAC is committed to keeping agricultural land in production, ensuring counties have a seat at the table when state agricultural policy is developed, preserving local land use authority necessary to protect rural communities and agricultural production. When the state helps willing landowners retain agricultural land in active use rather than subdivide or convert it, both the agricultural economy and rural character are better protected. Long-term agricultural viability also depends on farm succession, workforce needs, and access to land and equipment for the next generation of farmers. FAC supports policies that protect working agricultural lands, strengthen the next generation of Florida agriculture, and preserve county authority to address local land use, infrastructure, and community impacts before rural communities and food production capacity are permanently diminished.

B. Food Security and Agricultural Stewardship: Food insecurity remains a significant challenge for Florida families, and counties often respond through local human services. FAC advocates for continued state investment in programs that connect families facing food insecurity with Florida-grown food. Good stewardship also means making the fullest use of that food, extending its shelf life, and moving it efficiently through the system to reduce waste. This approach improves public health outcomes, eases pressure on human services systems, supports Florida producers, and strengthens community resilience during economic disruptions, disasters and other emergencies. FAC supports continued state investment in programs that connect families facing food insecurity with Florida-grown food and promote efficient food distribution, storage, and use.

RURAL AFFAIRS

A. Rural Appropriations: Florida's rural and fiscally constrained counties face fiscal challenges distinct from those of urban and suburban counties. These counties often

experience added pressures in meeting essential service, infrastructure, and community needs with fewer available resources. FAC supports preserving and strengthening state programs that provide these counties with essential resources and infrastructure funding, and supports a statutory definition of "fiscally constrained county" that aligns with current fiscal conditions in rural Florida.

B. Rural Infrastructure and Economic Development: FAC prioritizes sustained investment in rural infrastructure, workforce development, and job growth, and encourages continued collaboration among counties, industry, and the state to expand rural economic opportunity. This includes designation and continued investment in Rural Areas of Opportunity, *incentives and match waivers available through Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), and* recurring state funding for the Small County Outreach Program and Small County Road Assistance Program, which help Florida's smallest counties maintain roads and other essential infrastructure. FAC supports policies that give rural counties the resources and flexibility necessary to build durable local economies while maintaining the character and quality of life that define rural Florida.

FEDERAL

A. Farm Bill Reauthorization and Rural Development: County governments' ability to provide services financed by property and other local taxes is closely tied to farm income and rural business activity. Agriculture must therefore remain integral to comprehensive rural development. FAC calls for full and timely reauthorization and adequate funding of federal Farm Bill programs that support agricultural production, rural development, conservation, nutrition, disaster recovery, and that provide the long-term certainty rural communities need.

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