

Misconceptions and Facts: The Agricultural Reserve in Palm Beach County

Forced to Farm Political Action Committee

Introduction

- ▶ This presentation outlines misconceptions and facts regarding the Palm Beach County Agricultural Reserve. We hope you find clarity on issues that are often misconstrued and support us in lifting the burdensome property restrictions placed on the private property owners in the Agricultural Reserve.

Misconceptions and Facts

- ▶ Misconception: The Agricultural Reserve was established to preserve farmland.
 - ▶ **FACT: The Agricultural Reserve Master Plan allowed for commercial and residential development as well as other uses within the Ag Reserve.**
- ▶ Misconception: The public owns all of the Agricultural Reserve.
 - ▶ **FACT: The \$100 million bond purchased 2,400 acres. In total, the public owns about 10% of the Ag Reserve, according to the 2000 Ag Master Plan.**

Misconceptions and Facts

- ▶ Misconception: The soil in the Ag Reserve is special.
 - ▶ The soil in the Ag Reserve is very poor at best, it is mostly sand. Vegetable farmers must use large amounts of expensive fertilizer in order to produce a crop.
 - ▶ The container nursery growers never use the soil on their property to produce plants. The soil used in potted plants must be purchased.

Misconceptions and Facts

- ▶ Misconception: Freezes do not occur in the Ag Reserve.
 - ▶ **FACT: Freezes occur frequently in the Ag Reserve and damage crops and some growers do not recover.**
 - ▶ In December of 1989 over Christmas a 3 Day freeze destroyed many nurseries and vegetable farms, some did not recover and they went out of business.
 - ▶ During the 1990's we had not only freezes but Hurricanes and so called storms of the century (March 1993). Many farms did not recover.
 - ▶ 2000's ongoing freeze events every winter, some worse than others. As well as other weather events, i.e. Hurricane Wilma 2006.

Misconceptions and Facts

- ▶ Misconception: The policy changes that are being discussed will impact the entire Ag Reserve.
 - ▶ **Fact: The changes being discussed will only impact about 13% of the Ag Reserve.**
- ▶ Misconception: With changes in the Ag Reserve no land will be preserved.
 - ▶ **FACT: Land has been preserved in the Agricultural Reserve; 28% or 6,680 acres have been preserved in the Agricultural Reserve**

Misconceptions and Facts

- ▶ Misconception: There is only agriculture in the Ag Reserve.
 - ▶ **FACT: Currently there is both Residential/Commercial Development which has increased from 1,721 acres (8%) of the Ag Reserve to 6,290 acres (29%).**
- ▶ Misconception: Land owners knew they were purchasing land in the Ag Reserve
 - ▶ **FACT: Many private property owners purchased their land before the Ag Reserve existed and were never notified of the land use change.**

Misconceptions and Facts

- ▶ Misconception: Agriculture is sustainable in the Ag Reserve:
 - ▶ **FACT: The “critical mass” for Agriculture has been lost.**
 - ▶ Nursery industry acreage in the Ag Reserve has declined by 21%. (2000-2014) (1,759 acres to 1,396 acres).
 - ▶ Row crop farming has significantly declined and many of the current row crop farms are currently leasing land that is approved for future development.
- ▶ Misconception: All vegetable grown in Palm Beach County are grown in the Ag Reserve.
 - ▶ **FACT: Only 1.5% of the vegetable crops produced in Palm Beach County are in the Agricultural Reserve.**

Sources: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fe941> and Property Appraiser's Office

FACT: County Commission has approved schools, hospitals, churches, and roads to support the growing residential community in the Ag Reserve

▶ Hospital

- ▶ West Bethesda Hospital - 80 bed hospital with 300 employees - opened in January 2013.
 - ▶ Can expand to a 400-bed hospital with two onsite physician offices.

▶ Schools

- ▶ Somerset Academy Charter School

▶ Churches

- ▶ Boynton Beach Community Church
- ▶ Our Lady Queen of Peace
- ▶ Coptic Christian Church

▶ Roads

- ▶ Lyon's Road Extension
- ▶ Flavor Pic Road Extension (approved and planned for Jan 2015)
- ▶ Widening of West Atlantic Ave.

FACT: Private property owners, including nursery owners, are paying \$1.5 million for a water line that is of no use to them with their current land use

- ▶ **Palm Beach County Commission approved Resolution No. R 2005-0588 - 0590 for the Special Assessment process for the West Atlantic Avenue and State Road 7 Area Wastewater Force Main Extension Project, whereas it states, "This project will serve 41 commercial and 2 residential properties." There was a vision that these properties would become commercial properties.**
- ▶ **Given the purpose of the water main, agriculture does not benefit from this assessment.**

Agriculture was not considered when expanding roadways within the Ag Reserve

- ▶ As quoted by a private property owner, “We purchased our Ag land in 1985 on 156th Court South. This is now an Ag area that must deal with the heavy traffic on Lyons Road south of Atlantic Ave. To the South we have Mizner Country Club, to the North we have a Coptic Christian Church and the Delray Market Place. It is impossible to get large trucks onto Lyons Road and some of the companies that deliver to us and buy from us have refused to drive down 156th court. The Ag Reserve was not in place when we bought and we were never notified or ask for our opinion. This section of Lyons Road is two lanes and no turning lanes for 156th Court (which are primarily nurseries).”

Misconceptions and Facts

- ▶ Misconception: The Ag Reserve Master Plan was adopted by the Palm Beach County Commission.
 - ▶ **FACT: The Master Plan was never adopted by the county commission; however, policies were set based on this never-adopted plan.**
- ▶ Misconception: There are ways to save the agriculture within the Agricultural Reserve.
 - ▶ **FACT: It is too late. The critical mass for agriculture in the Ag Reserve has been lost.**

Conclusion

- ▶ The land owners of the 13% of remaining lands within Palm Beach County's Agricultural Reserve have been unduly burdened by property restrictions. We advocate that the Palm Beach County Government treat the private property owners in the Agricultural Reserve equally to private property owners throughout Palm Beach County and restore their property rights.

Misconceptions and Facts: The Agricultural Reserve in Palm Beach County

Prepared by: Forced to Farm Political Action Committee

March 6, 2015