

The undersigned landowners in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) represent the landowners that own more than 2,500 acres of land in that region. For the reasons stated below, the undersigned landowners do not support any governmental acquisition of additional farm lands south of Lake Okeechobee to solve issues that are being caused north of Lake Okeechobee and in Martin County. We are not willing sellers of our property to the government.

Water reservoirs south of Lake Okeechobee simply cannot store enough water to stop the discharges from Lake Okeechobee when our region is inundated from heavy rains.

- In 2016 alone, more than 2.9 million acre-feet of water entered Lake Okeechobee from the north resulting in 2.5 million acre-feet being discharged east and west from Lake Okeechobee. Combined with an additional 2.8 million acre-feet of local basin run off in the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie watersheds, the total discharges to the estuaries exceeded 5 million acre-feet during 2016. With this immense volume of water, it's impossible to store our way out of this problem.
- Even if a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee was constructed at a cost of multi-billions of dollars, 93% of the total discharges to the estuaries would still have occurred this year. Furthermore, during these wet conditions, constraints in the Everglades would not allow more water to be sent south creating a full reservoir with no place for the water to go.

Buying more land does not fix the problem.

- Additional land in public ownership would not have prevented this year's algae outbreak in Martin County and isn't the long-term solution. No local, state or federal agency that has seriously studied South Florida's complex water issues is calling for the purchase of Everglades Agricultural Area land as part of any strategies for solving our region's water challenges.
- The EAA is NOT the cause of the algae blooms that occurred in south Florida estuaries. Studies have determined that nutrients from local sources, including ageing septic systems, in the coastal communities are the primary cause of harmful algal blooms in the Indian River Lagoon. We support Governor Scott's initiative to provide 50/50 cost share grants for septic to sewer conversion in this region.
- Data from the South Florida Water Management District shows that communities south of Lake Okeechobee only contribute 3 percent of the water to the Lake yet those calling for EAA land to be bought want our communities to be 100 percent of the solution.

Farmers in the Everglades Agricultural Area have been working to restore the Everglades for more than two decades.

- EAA farmers have supported the passage of key legislation at the state and federal levels including seeking state and federal appropriations to build critical projects found in the Everglades Forever Act and the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP).
- EAA farmer's commitment to Everglades restoration has gone much further than simply supporting government efforts.

- Farmers south of Lake Okeechobee have adopted innovative, nutrient-reducing farming solutions known as Best Management Practices (BMPs) resulting in a long-term average reduction of nutrients entering the Everglades Protection Area by 55%. Over 3,000 metric tons of phosphorus has been prevented from entering the Everglades through these on-farm practices 100% paid for at the land owners expense.
- Our BMPs, developed with the University of Florida and regulated by the South Florida Water Management District, have helped to ensure that 100 percent of the water in Everglades National Park and more than 90 percent of water in the approximately 2.4 million acres of the rest of the Everglades Protection Area is meeting the stringent 10 parts per billion standard for phosphorous.

Water quality improvements on our lands are 100 percent paid for by EAA farmers.

- In addition to our property taxes, EAA farmers pay an additional “agricultural privilege tax” of \$25 per acre to fund regional Everglades water quality projects. This tax has raised more than \$240 million for Everglades restoration in addition to the more than \$200 million that we have spent funding research and on-farm water clean-up efforts.
- The more than \$400 million contributed by farmers is more than any other private group – environmental groups included – has committed to Everglades restoration in history.

Farmers south of Lake Okeechobee have seen over 120,000 acres of their farmland purchased by the state.

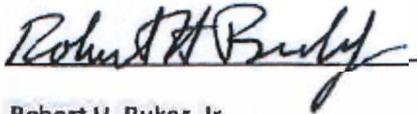
- Since Everglades restoration efforts began in earnest in the 1990s, three sugar mills have closed costing the Glades region hundreds if not thousands of good paying jobs.
- These restoration features have improved water quality and flows into the Everglades.
- Storage south of the Lake has never been contemplated to be the solution for the Lake Okeechobee discharges. In CERP, as well as in CEPP, the EAA reservoir is primarily intended to provide water to the Everglades with ancillary benefits to the estuaries.
- CERP always envisioned underground water storage around the Lake as the solution to the Lake discharges.

While a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee would do little to provide relief to the coastal estuaries, there is a solution – build the CERP projects authorized since 2000, including the recently authorized Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP).

- Develop and implement the projects north of Lake Okeechobee to capture, store, and treat the water before it enters the Lake.
- There are also dozens of approved federal and state projects, specifically designed to fix the plumbing around Lake Okeechobee, that are pending and awaiting funding. These projects, once completed, will help to reduce the frequency of the discharges from Lake Okeechobee.

It's up to all of us to do our part to finish restoring the Everglades and fixing Lake Okeechobee. Plans to buy land with little to no benefit to environmental restoration only serve as a distraction. By staying focused on the science, we can ensure reaching the goal we started more than two decades ago can become a reality.

U.S. Sugar



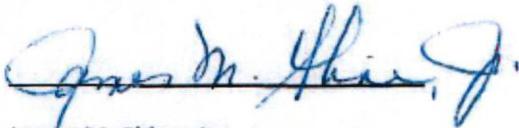
Robert H. Buker, Jr.

Big B Sugar Corporation



Robert J. Underbrink

Glades Sugar Farms



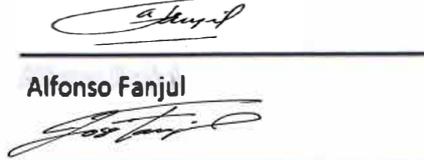
James M. Shine, Jr.

Roth Farms, Inc.



Raymond R. Roth, Jr.

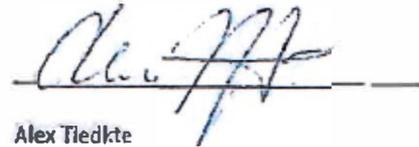
Florida Crystals Corporation



Alfonso Fanjul

J. Pepe Fanjul

Eastgate Farms



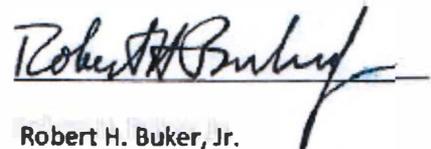
Alex Tiedkte

Hundley Farms, Inc.



John L. Hundley

SBG Farms, Inc.



Robert H. Buker, Jr.

Star Ranch Enterprises, Inc.



Justin G. Sobie

Star Farms Corporation



Justin G. Sobie

Trucane Sugar Corporation



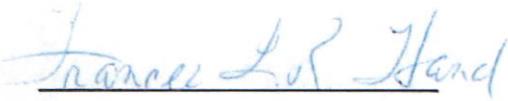
Alfonso Azqueta

Wedgworth Farms, Inc.



Dennis Wedgworth

Frances L. R. Hand



Frances L. R. Hand

Homer J. Hand



Homer J. Hand