Florida’s legislative session is off to an early start in 2020 and it promises to be especially busy. Lawmakers convened on January 14 to begin consideration of a number of bills, including SB 712 (Mayfield), the water quality bill incorporating initial recommendations from the Blue-Green Algae Task Force created by Governor Ron DeSantis. TPF is working with other ag and industry groups to monitor this and other legislation that could significantly impact agriculture. Here are a few to watch.

SB 712 and the companion HB 1343. These bills address the water quality issues championed by Gov. Ron DeSantis and incorporate the initial recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force including moving septic oversight from DOH to FDEP; septic to sewer conversion grants and infrastructure updates; adopting biosolids rules; and requiring FDACS to verify BMP compliance more frequently (every 2 years). Of concern: SB 712 requires that UF/IFAS and other state universities with agricultural research programs develop research plans on BMPs which can be submitted as legislative budget requests. This could provide funding for larger and more costly “basic science” work not generally covered by private and individual grants.

HB 1199 and SB 1382, Rights of Nature: Florida environmental groups are seeking support to grant legal rights to environmental features - specifically, the Santa Fe River, Wekiva River, Econlockhatchee River, Caloosahatchee River, Indian River Lagoon.

(Continued on page 14)
Loving Group Acquires H & H Sod Company

The Loving Group recently acquired H&H Sod Farm, which is located in Orlando, Florida. The Loving Group ranked No. 70 on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list in 2018. “Although our company has been built solely through organic growth rather than acquisitions, we found that the shared values and belief in fostering strong communities made this opportunity a natural fit,” said Mike Haynes, founder and CEO of Loving. Founded in 1969 by Danny and Lois Hall, H&H Sod Farm has grown to become one of the largest sod farming operations in the state of Florida. In addition to the H&H Sod Farm acquisition, Loving has created a strategic partnership with both Scotts and Bethel Turf to join in the production and distribution of ProVista Turf throughout the state of Florida. “Bethel and Scotts are happy to welcome Loving into the ProVista network; we are excited about the numerous distribution opportunities that Loving provides through the strong relationships that they have created,” said Will Nugent, owner of Bethel Turf. “We believe that this step is a major milestone in our effort to increase public awareness and education about ProVista Turf. We are thrilled that numerous homebuilders throughout the state that have already committed to transition their new lawns over to ProVista Turf, providing homebuyers a superior looking turfgrass that requires a fraction of the maintenance.” Loving is headquartered in Gastonia, North Carolina and offers landscaping, outdoor living and sod farming services to both local and national homebuilding clients throughout the Southeastern United States.

Unusable Pesticides? Operation Cleansweep Can Help!
Applications are still being accepted for Operation Cleansweep, a program funded by the Florida Legislature and administered through FDEP and FDACS that offers a safe, convenient, and cost effective mechanism for agricultural operations, golf courses, and pest control companies to properly dispose of canceled, suspended, and unusable pesticides (CSUP). Pickup applications must be made in advance; applicants will be notified of scheduling. Through June 2017, Operation CleanSweep had collected and disposed of more than 1,762,000 pounds (881 tons) of canceled, suspended and unusable pesticides from more than 2,400 participants in all 67 counties. For more information, email Shannon.Turner@fdacs.gov or call 877-851-5285.

TPF Job Board Available to Members
TPF’s Job Board is a free service to members. Email job specifics and contact information to betsympcull@floridaturf.com. Be sure to specify whether you prefer limited distribution (for example, email to members only) or would like it posted online to our website.

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www.ftga.org

2020 Turfgrass Producers International Conference and Field Day
February 17-20, 2020 – Orlando, Florida
Field Day @ H&H Sod, Kenansville, Florida
www.turfgrasssod.org/events

Growing Better: The 2020 TPF Annual Meeting and Field Day
April 23-24, 2020 – Tampa - Parrish, Florida
Field Day @ Tampa Bay Farms, Parrish Florida
www.floridaturf.com/events
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TPF Announces Member Scholarship Program

Turfgrass Producers of Florida is pleased to announce the development of a new scholarship program exclusively for members. The TPF Member Scholarship Program will provide one $1,000 award annually and is open to:

- A child or grandchild of a TPF Member (known as a Member-Sponsor) who has maintained an active membership in the association for no less than three (3) years prior to application;
- An employee or child of an employee of an eligible Member-Sponsor who is nominated by that member;
- A TPF member pursuing additional education as a returning/non-traditional student.

While the Formation Committee is still working through specific guidelines, there will be unique aspects of the program designed to provide opportunities to promising students who may be overlooked for other awards.

For example, the scholarship may be used toward an accredited technical or certification program as well as traditional college and university degree programs. And in recognition of changing technologies and varied abilities, students have the option of submitting a video “essay” in lieu of a written one.

“The purpose of the program is to provide an additional member benefit and to reach students who may not excel in traditional university-geared curriculums, but show promise and deserve help,” explained TPF executive director Betsy McGill. “And while our first mission is to help students whose careers would lead them to work in agriculture or the green industries, applicants in almost any field of study are invited to apply if they meet the eligibility requirements.”

The program is expected to begin accepting applications by the end of February. A Selection Committee will review applications and announce a recipient in May (if there are eligible applicants). Funds will be released upon proof of enrollment during the first part of August. TPF members should watch for more details in the coming weeks!

1990-2020

TPF Turns 30:
Celebrating TPF’s Heritage Members

As Turfgrass Producers of Florida celebrates three decades of working for the state’s sod producers, we’d like to recognize those member farms whose support was crucial to forming the organization and who have remained supporters for 30 years: our TPF Heritage Members.

These farms were original members of the Florida Sod Growers Cooperative in 1990 are still active members today. Some are corporate members who have made it a priority to have representatives in the association, many of whom have served on the board of directors and/or as officers. Others are family farms, some celebrating a second generation of supports as their children continue the legacy of leadership and involvement. We appreciate your dedication to TPF and to the Florida sod industry!

We Need Your Help! If during our birthday year we get anything wrong or inadvertently leave anyone out, don’t hesitate to let us know. Farm names may have changed, and some of our historical records are brief, so be sure to contact us!

- A. Duda & Sons (multiple locations)
- Bayside Sod | Sarasota
  Founding member: Jack Bispham
  Current members: Tiffany Bailey & Paul Bispham, Jr.
- Bethel Farms | Arcadia
  Original and current member: Will Nugent
- Council Growers | Ruskin
  Founding member: Pat Council
  Current member: Travis Council
- Floriturf, Inc. | Ft. McCoy
  Founding member: Donald Johnson
  Current member: Travis Johnson
- Travis Resmondo Sod | Dundee
  (Formerly Gary L. Resmondo Sod)
  Founding member: Gary L. Resmondo
  Current member: Travis Resmondo
- H & H Sod Company | Kenansville
  Founding & current members: Danny & Lois Hall
- King Ranch | Belle Glade
  Founding & current member: Paul Grose
- S & K Sod Company | St. Cloud
  Founding & current member: David Smith
- SMR Taylor Ranch | Bradenton
  (Formerly SMR Turf)

Something to Celebrate:
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Growing Better is going to Tampa! Join us for two days of networking and learning, along with a generous dose of just plain fun. Connect with colleagues, catch up on relevant industry issues, and support the association through our only major fundraiser. See you there!

**Early Arrival Reception**  
Embassy Suites, Tampa/Brandon • Wednesday evening, April 22  
Guests staying at the Embassy Suites and arriving on Wednesday evening are invited to join us downstairs in the lobby for a two hour Meet and Greet reception.

### Thursday, April 23, 2020

**All events at Top Golf Tampa**

- **11:30 AM - 1:30 PM** • **Annual Meeting Lunch**  
  Start your day at our Annual Meeting lunch for highlights of the association’s work and outstanding speakers on topics relevant to the industry and your business. ($50 per person)

- **2:00 PM - 5:00 PM** • **Top Golf FUN-draiser**  
  More than just a tournament, this event is designed for everyone, from experts to those who just like swinging a club. Sign up individually, gather up a team, or treat your customers or employees to a day out. Play for fun or participate in one of two tournament brackets - amateur or experienced - in a best ball format. ($75 per person)

- **6:30 PM - 9:00 PM** • **Reception & Dinner**  
  Relax and enjoy our popular Growing Better reception and Dinner, where we’re always cooking up something fun! Visit with friends and help yourself to a scrumptious buffet while plotting your Reverse Draw fundraiser strategy. Come see what we’re cooking up this year! Dress is casual. ($75 per person)

### Friday, April 24, 2020

**Field Day at Tampa Bay Farms**

- **9:00 AM - 1:30 PM** • **Field Day and Industry Show**  
  Yes! It’s a Field Day year! Growing Better is designed to showcase the “best of” in products and services for sod growers and customers as well as innovations and ideas to help your business grow. Join us for equipment displays and demonstrations and a supplier show area, along with our bucket raffle and barbeque lunch, courtesy of Everglades Equipment Group. ($50 per person)
**Exhibit Space**
Deadline to Reserve Exhibit Space: **Friday, April 17**

Catch up with your existing customers and find new ones during our Friday trade show! Tabletop exhibit space is available for $350 and includes one 8 foot table and admission for one representative to Friday’s Field Day (additional company representatives are only $25 per person for Friday only). Equipment Exhibit spaces (up to four pieces of equipment) are $400 and include admission for 2 representatives for Friday’s Field Day only. The Annual Meeting Lunch, Top Golf Fundraiser and Reception & Dinner are not included with exhibit space.

**Sponsorships** (Exhibitors and Non-Exhibitors)
Deadline for event signage: **Friday, April 10**

Sponsorships increase recognition for your company and help us provide the best possible business and educational events for Florida growers and industry partners. All sponsorships include recognition at the event, on our website, and in our newsletter along with event admissions and bonus options - like Exhibit Space or additional admissions - based on your level of support. They’re a great value! Visit [www.floridaturf.com/events](http://www.floridaturf.com/events) for details.

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**Field Day Host Farm**
Tampa Bay Farms

Located just off County Road 62 in Parrish, Tampa Bay Farms is a collaboration between two of TPF’s Heritage Members: Bayside Sod and Council Growers. Travis Council’s family has produced citrus and sod in the Ruskin area for over 30 years; his father Pat was one of the founding members of the Florida Sod Growers Cooperative (now TPF), and Travis currently serves as president of the association. Tiffany Bailey and her brother Paul Bispham own and manage Bayside Sod, having taken over the business from their father Jack Bispham. Tampa Bay Farms offers nearly 200 acres of quality Floratam and ProVista St. Augustine, Bimini Bermudagrass and Empire Zoysia. TPF extends its sincere thanks for their willingness to host Growing Better 2020!

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**Plan Your Travel**

- **Host Hotel**
  Embassy Suites by Hilton | Tampa Brandon
  10220 Palm River Road | Tampa, Florida 33619 | Tel: 813-653-1905

  Located less than a mile from Top Golf, the Embassy Suites is this year’s host hotel. Make reservations by **Wednesday, April 8** for the group rate of $155 per night (standard room, plus taxes; self-parking is free). Call and ask for the TPF group rate or visit [www.floridaturf.com/events](http://www.floridaturf.com/events) to use our **Group Reservations link**. Reservations made after April 8 are subject to availability; group rate is not guaranteed.

- **TopGolf Tampa/Brandon**
  10690 Palm River Road | Tampa, Florida 33619 | Tel: 813-298-1811

- **Tampa Bay Farms**
  24831 State Road 62, Parrish, FL 34219

  Tampa Bay Farms is located approximately 30 miles south of the Tampa/Brandon area. Anticipate in-town traffic partway along some routes. Registration and show opens at 9:00 AM this year.

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Online registration and printable registration forms will be available at [www.floridaturf.com/events](http://www.floridaturf.com/events).

**Deadline for General Registration:** **Friday, April 17, 2020**

- **Mail:** Turfgrass Producers of Florida
  P.O. Box 217, LaBelle, FL 33975

- **Email:** Scan and email registrations to betsymcgill@floridaturf.com.

- **Questions?** Call us at 863-675-2144 or email betsymcgill@floridaturf.com.
Understand the Rights of Nature Movement
By Charles Shinn, Florida Farm Bureau Federation

Back in 1972 when I was building forts in citrus trees in Winter Haven, the Southern California Law Review published an article entitled “Should trees have standing – towards legal rights for natural objects”. It would usher in a decades-long movement toward expanding the body of legal rights to environmental features: the Rights of Nature.

The words “amazed” or “baffled” don’t do justice when I think about the Rights of Nature movement. Who could imagine that the citrus tree might one day sue me for pounding nails into it? How did we get here? Here’s a brief look.

- Also in 1972, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas asserted in a dissenting opinion in a case between the Sierra Club and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior that natural objects should have standing to sue for their own protection.
- In 1989, University of California professor Roderick Nash published The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics, highlighting the “right-less” throughout history, including slaves and women, and by extension, nature, and how through time and civil unrest, rights expanded.
- We see the first Rights of Nature recognized in law in 2006 in Tamaqua Borough, Pennsylvania, where dumping sewage sludge was banned as “violating the Rights of Nature.”
- In 2015, Pope Francis called for a new era of environmental protection before the United Nations, declaring that, “A true right of the environment does exist.”

The movement became a worldwide firestorm, coming to a head in the U.S. in 2019 when the Lake Erie Bill of Rights (LEBOR) became law.

To understand how this happens, we need to understand that Toledo, Ohio is a charter city, which is different than a statutory or general law city. The major distinction is that a statutory or general law city can only do what the state legislature, through law, allows them to do. A charter city (sometimes called a home rule city) can pass additional laws or regulations it deems necessary unless they conflict with state law.

The passage of LEBOR empowered any Toledo citizen to file lawsuits on behalf of the lake.

It gave the citizenry of Toledo authority over nearly 5 million Ohio residents, thousands of farms, more than 400,000 businesses and every level of government in 35 northern Ohio counties plus parts of Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York and Canada.

In a February 26, 2019 special election, Toledo residents adopted the Lake Erie Bill of Rights following three years of fighting to get it on the municipal ballot, mostly by out-of-state interests such as the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF). Citing many of the recent environmental ills such as blue-green algal blooms on Lake Erie and the Flint Michigan water crisis, activists promoted the charter amendment using the message: “Who doesn’t like clean water? This is just a way to ensure that the lake is protected.” Unsuspecting residents eagerly signed cards to get the issue on the ballot then voted overwhelmingly to adopt it, making it the first U.S. law to secure legal rights for an ecosystem. (It should be noted that though the measure passed by a vote of 61%, only 8.9% of Toledo’s voters cast a ballot.)

LEBOR states that Lake Erie has the right to exist, flourish and naturally evolve, and that the people of the City of Toledo have the right to a clean and healthy environment, including a clean and healthy Lake Erie. LEBOR prohibits any corporation (defined to include any business) or government from violating these rights, and it allows the city or any resident of the city to sue in state court to enforce these rights. The amendment further provides that Lake Erie itself may enforce its rights as a named plaintiff and real party in interest through a suit brought by the city or any resident of the city. A corporation or government violating LEBOR is subject to criminal fines and strict liability for all harms resulting from its violations, including damages for the cost of restoration.

Furthermore, the passage of LEBOR empowered any Toledo citizen to file lawsuits on behalf of the lake. It gave the citizenry of Toledo authority over nearly 5 million Ohio residents, thousands of farms, more than 400,000 businesses and every level of government in 35 northern Ohio counties plus parts of Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York and Canada.

Ohio Farm Bureau recognized early on the direct threat this type of action would have on agriculture. Anyone who does anything within the Lake Erie basin can be suspected of “harming the lake”. What faced millions of residents, farms and businesses was the prospect of costly legal bills fighting over a measure that will likely be found unconstitutional and unenforceable.

With assistance from Ohio Farm Bureau, one farm within the basin filed a lawsuit in the Federal District Court of Northern Ohio challenging the constitutionality and legal status of LEBOR, arguing that the law violates federal constitutional rights, including equal protection and freedom of speech, and is unenforceable for its vagueness. The Ohio legislature also included a provision in their budget bill that clarified that nature does not have rights nor can a citizen stand in their place and bring an action on their behalf. It cannot stop LEBOR or initiatives like it from going on the state ballot, but it does provide a solid way to challenge such initiatives on state law grounds should they pass.

There are many similarities to what is happening in Florida
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today, including the involvement of CELDF, the out-of-state advocacy group that pushed LEBOR in Toledo. The CELDF version of the Rights of Nature movement first showed up in Alachua County last August at a kickoff meeting for the Santa Fe Bill of Rights. SAFEBOR was explained as a way to “force cleaner water and more water supply in the Santa Fe River upon the state agencies because current state law is not adequate to protect the river.”

The movement quickly created Facebook and social media presence, received acceptance for ballot language by Alachua County’s Charter Review Commission and have since been collecting the 18,100 valid signatures needed for the charter amendment to be on this fall’s ballot. Since the kickoff, there have been numerous positive lead editorials in the Gainesville Sun promoting their cause. Will they get the signatures needed? I have no doubt whatsoever. Will it pass if it is on the ballot? It seems likely.

Shortly after the Santa Fe Bill of Rights movement got up to speed, we found out that WEBOR - the Wekiva Econlockhatchee Bill of Rights movement - had been formed in Orange County. Unlike Alachua County’s Charter Review Committee, Orange County’s CRC was much more skeptical, and at the time of publication, had not accepted it after numerous drafts. The commission members have been cognizant enough to understand that this type of amendment to the charter may be quite costly to the county. Interestingly, both the Alachua and Orange County charter wording includes a clause that holds harmless any activity taken on by the county.

Of the 67 counties in Florida, 20 of them have a charter form of government. A similar movement was begun for the Caloosahatchee River in Lee County but has not gained traction; at least two more (the Kissimmee River in Osceola County and the Indian River Lagoon in Brevard County) have shown interest.

Given that we have seen activity in multiple counties and recognizing both the current political climate and the general lack of understanding for water and nutrients (including those naturally occurring in Florida), we felt it prudent to address this issue by proposing state legislative action, using science as our point of reason.

Sen. Ben Albritton (R-26) clearly understood the magnitude of this issue by adding language in his Environmental Protection Act Bill (SB 298) which states: “A local government regulation, ordinance code, rule, comprehensive plan, or charter may not recognize, grant, convey, or extend legal standing or legal rights, as those terms are generally construed, to a plant, an animal, a body of water, or any other part of the natural environment which is not a person or a political subdivision, as defined in section 1.01(8), unless otherwise specifically authorized by state law or the State Constitution.” Yes! We were now on the playing field in the legislative realm! Now to get a companion bill in the House. That came through recently when Rep. Blaise Ingoglia (R-Spring Hill) filed House Bill 1193.

Now it is time to duke it out at the capitol and you can expect a lot of rhetoric to fly with this issue. Certainly the environmental activists will pit big business and big lobbies against the defenseless environment. We will likely also see some of the charter counties oppose the bills as a move against local rule. I do think that some charter counties will consider the potential cost of such measures and remain on the sidelines.

Business lobbies and any groups that are concerned about private property rights will stand of the front lines in support of these bills. We will highlight the environmental protections that our current statutes provide and will strongly stand in support noting that these rights are not necessary to achieve the goals that the state has set.

We will also highlight that charter amendments such as this violate the U.S. Constitution, including: (1) the right to freedom of speech and the right to petition the courts under the First Amendment; (2) the right of equal protection; (3) Fifth Amendment protections against vagueness, and (4) the right of due process. It is going to be a battle for sure but we are determined that common sense will prevail in the end and the passed legislation will be signed by the Governor. That said, we will likely need your help. Please take prompt action if you are asked to do so. You can also sign up for alerts on our website by going to www.floridafarmbureau.org, click on Advocacy, then Legislative Action Center.

We must resist thinking that this idea is just crazy and that it can never happen. In working around many of these activist groups on a lot of different fronts, I can tell you that they are dead serious.

Florida has one of the most aggressive environmental restoration programs in the nation. We continue to improve daily as we follow the science. Achieving these goals will not happen through regulation or placing environmental features on the same level as humankind. They will happen through the best management practices that we have incorporated.

Charles Shinn is the Director of Government and Community Affairs for Florida Farm Bureau Federation representing Farm Bureau and the agricultural community on water, natural resources, and growth management issues. Charles also works with state and federal agencies including the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Additionally, he serves as a representative for the agriculture industry on local government issues throughout Florida. He can be reached at 352-374-1522 or by emailing Charles.Shinn@ffbf.org.

Learn More: https://rightsofnature.org

Includes information on Florida Rights of Nature initiatives.

Learn More: https://celdf.org

In November 2018, representatives from several associations, agribusiness, the University of Florida, and other stakeholders met at the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association to explore the possibility of creating a bi-partisan group to promote sound water policy and seek solutions to long-term water quality protection.

The catalyst was that summer’s outbreak of blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) and red tide along Florida’s coastal areas and the media targeting of agriculture as the major contributor. FFVA Board chair Paul Allen envisioned a broad coalition of stakeholders that could not only address the negative media attention focused on ag, but which could grow into a broader coalition of stakeholders - from utilities and water management districts to businesses and individual citizens - based on the idea that as everyone living in Florida impacts water quality to some degree, working together would allow for greater understanding among all parties and be a platform for mutual support of sound, science based policies that would significantly address root causes and encourage behavior changes to everyone’s benefit.

TPF is a member of the coalition, which was ultimately named “Together Florida” with the tagline “Protecting Our Water Legacy”, and is one of a dozen or so companies which contributed to the development of the coalition website, TogetherFlorida.org. The group developed policy statements and white papers that were distributed to legislators in 2019 and will continue those efforts during the 2020 session, focusing on the following priorities:

- Providing adequate funding for the Office of Agricultural Water Policy in the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- Within Basin Management Action Plans, supporting the creation of a nutrient reduction cost-share program to fund cooperative agricultural, urban, suburban, commercial, or institutional water-quality improvement management strategies.
- Within Basin Management Action Plans, supporting funding for data collection and research to improve the accuracy of estimated agricultural land uses and, where economically viable and technically feasible, improve agricultural best management practices, develop new practices, and develop nutrient reduction projects for willing agricultural participants.
- Supporting additional funding for the continued construction of aquifer storage and recovery wells within the Northern Everglades to reduce estuary discharges from Lake Okeechobee.
- Supporting appropriate funding for storage and treatment of water on public lands north of Lake Okeechobee. Public/private partnerships including dispersed water management should be encouraged and funded.
- Supporting continued funding for collaborative research to finding implementable solutions to mitigate red tide and blue-green algae.
- Requiring proper septic system maintenance for existing systems.
- Supporting funding to expedite repairs on the Herbert Hoover dike and encourage the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to increase water storage in the lake.
- Supporting funding for community education programs with incentives for homeowners who implement urban best management practices.

Coalition Stakeholders include:
- Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association
- Florida Farm Bureau
- Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association
- Florida Strawberry Growers Association
- Florida Blueberry Growers Association
- Florida Citrus Mutual
- Gulf Citrus Growers Association
- Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida
- U.S. Sugar
- Florida Crystals Corporation
- Florida Cattlemen’s Association
- Southeast Milk
- Turfgrass Producers of Florida
- Florida Turfgrass Association
- Environmental Research and Education Foundation
- Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association
- Florida Agribusiness Council
- Florida Land Council
- Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association
- Hopping Green & Sams, PA
- University of Florida | IFAS

Learn More: www.TogetherFlorida.org
4R Certification Program Launches in Florida
Source: Central Florida Ag News

Water quality is a topic near and dear to the hearts of those in Florida agriculture, and the announcement of a new Florida 4R Certification Program focusing on improving water quality is proof of that dedication. Announced at the first 4R Field Day on November 22 in Parrish, Florida, the Florida 4R Certification Program is the culminating effort of numerous state and national agencies and ag organizations operating in The Sunshine State. The program, only the third of its kind in the country, will add another tool in Florida ag’s toolkit to focus on water quality, and the list of the program’s supporters and creators is a who’s who of national and Florida-based ag agencies and organizations. David Royal, the Nutrient Stewardship Project Manager for the Florida chapter of The Nature Conservancy, a global environmental nonprofit, is heading the Florida 4R Certification Program. Serving as the chairman of the program’s board, Royal shared the ins and outs of the new program.

The 4Rs in Florida

With Florida’s finite amount of fresh water, a large ag industry, and a booming population, water quality has long been an important issue. “What is most important is the water quality,” Royal explains. Florida farmers and other ag industry stakeholders have long used the 4Rs to improve water quality in Florida and to fulfill their self-appointed role as good stewards of the environment.

“The 4Rs were developed by The Fertilizer Institute, the International Plant Nutrition Institute and the Canadian Fertilizer Institute,” Royal shares. “The 4Rs are the Right Source, the Right Rate, the Right Time, and the Right Place — it has the scientific backing that it helps improve and protect the water quality. The goal is to use practices that keep the nutrients in the root zone so they will be absorbed by the plant, and water management plays a major role.”

The Florida ag industry currently utilizes programs like the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Program and Best Management Practices (BMPs) to improve water quality in The Sunshine State. The Florida 4R Certification Program “is another tool that the ag industry is taking on their own to help improve and protect water quality,” Royal says.

Details of the New Florida 4R Certification Program

The new Florida 4R Certification Program has been in the works for some time, with the program’s board seeking input from ag industry stakeholders to create a program that would best suit. “We visited with fertilizer dealers, ag association groups, environmental groups, government agencies, and the public,” Royal says. Two stakeholder meetings saw input from attendees that were taken into consideration to benefit the program. Board members met four times in the past year to iron out the details. The board consisted of:

- Administrative Secretary Mary Hartney of the Florida Fertilizer and Agrichemical Association
- Chairman David Royal, The Nature Conservancy
- Vice Chairman Charlie Shinn, Florida Farm Bureau
- Bill Bartnick, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Anne Cook, Ag Retailers Association
- Michael Dukes, University of Florida | IFAS
- Sally Flis, The Fertilizer Institute
- Alan Jones, Farmer and Florida’s First 4R advocate
- Kerry Kates, Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
- Darrell Smith, Suwannee River Water Management Board

Royal explained that “this program is for fertilizer dealers, agronomists, and consultants. They will be audited by a third-party auditor to verify the recommendations that they are making to the farm.” The idea is that recommendations for 4R nutrient stewardship and BMPs must be tailored to each ag operation based on factors like the operation’s soil, the crops...
being grown, and other unique conditions that differ from farm to farm. By certifying those who make nutrient recommenda-
tions to farmers, growers, and ranchers - fertilizer dealers, agronomists, and consultants - the concepts and benefits of the
4Rs will be optimized when utilized on farms and ranches and
will have a greater impact on water quality.

Royal explains that the program will audit participants annually on 30 evaluation criteria: seven address 4R training and
teaching, twelve relate to nutrient recommendations, five address nutrient application, and six have to do with
maintenance of proper documentation. Royal adds that the "program works hand in hand with the BMP program."

Feedback concerning the Florida 4R Certification Program
from interested parties, such as the 130 or so farmers, fertilizer
dealers, ag industry stakeholders, government agencies and
officials who attended the Florida 4R Field Day, has been positive
so far.

"From what we’ve been told," Royal shared, "they see it as
a proactive, positive step that Florida agriculture producers are
taking on their own to help improve and protect water quality."

**Getting More Information**

The Florida 4R Certification Program is slated to begin January
2020 (with Global 4R Council approval). Royal says those interested in more information can email florida4rcertifica-
tion@gmail.com, and that the Global 4R Council is currently
working on a website that will have a link to the Florida 4R Certification Program.

Once started, the Florida 4R Certification Program is expected
to have a positive impact on Florida’s water quality and offer
another opportunity for those in Florida agriculture to set a
national example.

"Florida agriculture understands the importance of water
quality and wants to be the best stewards of it," Royal empha-
sized. "The land is what takes care of them, so they understand
they must take care of the land and its natural resources."

**Hundley Farms, Wedgworth’s Among Five 2020 4R Advocates**

The Fertilizer Institute has revealed the 2020 4R Advocates, five farmer and retailer pairs who have teamed up to turn the 4R Nutrient Stewardship principles into practice, yielding economic and environmental benefits on their farms.

“For nine years we’ve been honoring the true champions of 4R Nutrient Stewardship - the farmers and retailers who take risks to implement innovative fertilizer management and conserva-
tion practices,” said Lara Moody, TFI Vice President for Steward-
ship and Sustainability. "I’m thrilled that this year we’ve added 10 more excellent advocates who have so clearly demonstrated the real-world success of the 4Rs on their farms.”

The 4R Advocate Program has recognized 90 growers and

The 2020 Advocates are:

- Brian Ryber, Ryberg Farms, Buffalo Lake, Minn. Mike Welter, Central Region Cooperative, Buffalo Lake, Minn.
- Jeff O’Bannon, Morgan-O’Bannon Family Farm, Madison, Mo. Todd Ragsdale, Nutrien Ag Solutions, Paris, Mo.
- Jeremy Brown, Broadview Agriculture, Inc., Lubbock, Texas Taylor Allison, Eco-Drip Irrigation, Abernathy, Texas

The Advocates will be honored at an awards banquet hosted by TFI at the 2020 Commodity Classic in San Antonio, Texas, where they will also represent the 4R program during the Commodity Classic tradeshow. Throughout the year they will also be part of TFI’s outreach efforts to promote fertilizer management practices by hosting farm field days, participating in conference panels, and speaking on behalf of 4Rs to their farming peers.

The 4R Advocate program is one of many facets of a high-
priority campaign to raise awareness and adoption of 4R Nutrient Stewardship practices. Fertilizer is a key component of sustainable crop production systems, and the fertilizer industry recognizes the need to efficiently utilize these nutrients. 4R Advocates and other farmers have partnered with The Fertilizer Institute to demonstrate how 4R practices have led to cost-
efficiencies and improved environmental outcomes on their fields. More information and data on their efforts is available at *

4RFarming.org.

4R Nutrient Stewardship provides a framework to achieve in-
field goals, such as increased production and profitability, en-
hanced environmental protection, and improved sustainability. The 4R concept incorporates practices that use the right fertilizer source at the right rate, at the right time, and in the right place.
November Ballot Initiative Could Push Florida’s Minimum Wage to $15 by 2026

Florida’s minimum wage increased to $8.56 on January 1, 2020, up .10 cents from the 2019 rate, and may rise significantly if an initiative promoted by Orlando attorney John Morgan is approved by voters this fall.

The state’s minimum wage is already higher than the federal minimum wage of $7.25, which has remained stagnant for a decade.

The Fair Wage Amendment, sponsored by Floridians for a Fair Wage (www.floridafairwage.com), of which Morgan is chair, calls for an increase in the state’s minimum wage to $10 by 2021, with $1 per hour increases annually until a $15 per hour rate is met in 2026. Post 2026, minimum wage increases would return to annual adjustments for inflation, as currently outlined in the state constitution.

Morgan, who owns a firm of over 500 attorneys specializing in personal injury claims, filed a petition in 2018 asking that an initiative increasing the minimum wage be included on the 2020 state ballot.

The Florida Division of Elections requires that two signature thresholds be met for an initiative to be considered for a ballot position:

1) A statewide total of 8 percent of the votes cast in the last presidential election (currently listed as 766,200), and

2) Congressional District signature totals in at least 14 of Florida’s 27 Congressional Districts [8 percent of the votes cast in each Congressional District in the last presidential election].

Once these thresholds are met, the Florida Supreme Court must review the initiative and rule on the constitutionality and clarity of the ballot language.

On October 29, 2019, an FFW press release announced that the organization “...had collected 766,260 petitions from registered Florida voters-more than the 766,200 petitions required by the State...”. A December 19 release confirmed that the initiative had passed Supreme Court review and secured a place on the November ballot.

As of last fall, Morgan estimated that he had personally spent between $5-$7 million dollars promoting the initiative, considering it a “moral and ethical issue” which would “bring dignity to low-wage workers.” The initiative has also received considerable financial support from other organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, which has contributed $250,000 to the campaign.

Currently, only Florida ($8.56) and Arkansas ($9.25) have minimum wages higher than the federal requirement.

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(Continued from page 1)

and the Kissimmee River - equivalent to those of an individual. And while everyone agrees that our waterways deserve to be stewarded well and that clean water benefits everyone, the practical and legal consequences of this approach are deeply concerning (see Charles Shinn’s article on page 8 for a better understanding of this issue). Two bills - HB 1139 and SB 1382 - have provisions that would prohibit any local rule, ordinance, charter or other legal granting of rights to plants, animals, bodies of water or other environmental feature which isn’t a person or political subdivision.

We deeply appreciate being able to work with colleagues at Florida Farm Bureau Federation, Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, the H2O Coalition, the Ag Coalition, Together Florida (see more about this group on page 11) the Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association, FDACS-OAWP and others who are keeping watch in Tallahassee and working on behalf of Florida agriculture!

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