

HEALTHY FARMS-HEALTHY BAYS – FINDING COMMON GROUND WITHIN UNCOMMON PARTNERSHIPS

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Healthy Farms-Healthy Bays is a new initiative through Florida Climate Smart Agriculture with collaborative partners that is connecting upland farmers and ranchers and downstream aquaculture and aquatic ecosystem stakeholders to identify common ground and explore ways to work together toward a shared future vision. This joint effort focuses on enhancing sustainability of agricultural and fishing operations and improve water quality, fisheries, and habitat in key rivers, bays, and estuaries. Beginning in the Suwannee River watershed, Healthy Farms-Healthy Bays aims to unite a diverse team of industry leaders, using collaborative problem solving, to work together towards a future where healthy and productive ecosystems, bays, rivers, and streams are underpinned and supported by a vibrant and sustainable agricultural and fishing economy.

Healthy Farms-Healthy Bays is completing the first phase of these efforts for the Suwannee River Basin in March 2024. The goals of this phase are to 1) recruit industry representatives to form a Stakeholder Leadership Team, 2) identify shared interests and concerns, 3) share knowledge about existing restoration and sustainability projects and practices, 4) assess potential solution pathways using best available science, and 5) develop roadmap on how to move forward together toward common goals. The second phase will focus on continuing to bring together research, funding, and stakeholder partners to collaboratively put the roadmap created into action.

PRESENTER BIO: Mrs. Velez is an experienced environmental scientist, manager, and facilitator with more than 20 years of experience in natural resources research, management, outreach, and facilitation. She currently specializes in project management, meeting facilitation, stakeholder engagement, and strategic planning.