

Public Perception of Agriculture in the Context of Best Management Practices and Harmful Algal Blooms

Why Am I Talking About This?

- Fifth Generation Floridian farming cattle and citrus on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River
- Practicing Lawyer - Agricultural Law and Water Policy
- My work is helping farmers and ranchers stay in business and in compliance
- Unaddressed, public perception of Ag water quality ends my family's farming heritage during my stewardship

The Englishes moved to Alva in 1876 from North Florida, and homesteaded. They inter-married with the Blount and Hendry Families who were already there

The English Family Home – a cabin built in 1878 and this addition, built in the 1890's.

My great-great grandmother, Margaret McDougal English stands in the center and her daughter, Katherine English Solomon, stands to the left.



The Times They are A-changing

- Populism contrasts “good people” with “the greedy elites” - “hostile” to the people’s best interests
- At its best, populism involves a broad population in political decision making.
- At its worst, populism drives simplistic answers to complex questions in a highly emotional way

What Farmers and Ranchers Do

- Embrace Science and Technology
 - Ag produces more with fewer resources than ever
- Embrace Stewardship
 - Land and water are their largest and most essential assets
 - Most Ag land is owned by families
 - Ag lands are managed for the long term
- Respond to Market Demand for Food Products

Growing Citrus at Our Place

Then and...



Now



What People Think About Ag

- Farmers and Ranchers are “rich”
- Agriculture is “privileged” and “exempt” from regulation
 - Right to Farm Act
 - Agricultural Tax “Exemption”
 - “Presumption of Compliance”
 - Non-Point Source “Exemptions”
- Farmers and Ranchers fail their stewardship “obligations”
 - Blue Green Algae
 - Red Tide

The Results are In!

- Public Opinion:

- Our quality of life is at risk – something has to be done!
- Ag occupies the majority of the landscape – it must be Ag
- Ag said they were good stewards and look what happened
- Ag needs more regulation

- Agriculture:

- Ours, too! We did not break trust – weather happens
- Every land use drives these issues and so do legacy nutrients
- We are good stewards and this happened for a lot of reasons
- Ag is already highly regulated

How Did We Get Here?

- Ag SAID – we provide environmental services
 - (water quality, wildlife habitat, and open space)
- Ag did NOT SAY – our services are dependent on our economic success (but they are)
- Expectations for Ag in Florida are inverted
 - Protect the environment – ESPECIALLY water quality
 - Provide Open Space
 - Provide a safe, health food supply at a low price

So what happens now?

- Calls to force improvements in Ag water quality -
 - Executive Order 19-12
 - Basin Management Action Plans - adoptions and revisions
 - Blue Green Algae Task Force
 - CS for SB 712 and other bills in the 2020 Legislative Session

SO...How Do We Fix This?

- **BUILD ON WHAT WORKS...& BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES WORK**
- Myth: BMP's are voluntary
- **Fact: BMP'S are mandatory where there is an adopted Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP)**

But...

- Myth: BMP implementation isn't monitored
- **FACT: BMP Implementation is monitored**
 - **Comprehensive BMP Checklist Review by Agency Staff at Enrollment**
 - **Compliance Verification Visits**
 - **Independent Audits**

But...

- Myth: BMP's are outdated science
- **FACT: BMP's are effective regardless of their "age" – e.g. 4R's (right rate, time, source, place)**
- And - funding research to improve BMP's and understand legacy nutrients will help even more

BUT...

- Myth: BMP's don't work!
- **FACT - BMP's DO work -**
- **As part of a comprehensive land management program that is paired with public investment in research and statewide and regional projects to protect and restore water quality**

No Silver Bullet for Water?

- Removing agriculture from Florida won't fix it
- Removing people from Florida won't fix it
- Research, education, collaboration, and implementation of nutrient management for all land uses will fix it – but remember weather happens
- **Science based solutions that are timely, cost effective and technically and financially practical are the best protection for all of us**

Questions?

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