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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