

Feb 25 Meeting of the Union County Soil and Water Conservation District

Present:

Delbert Smith -- Chair

Pete Cameron -- Deputy Chair, Secretary

Duke Emerson -- Treasurer

Jon Croci -- Computer Systems

Basil Bactawar -- IFAS Agent, Union County

Scott Tucker -- FDACS Representative

Monica Jones -- NRCS Representative

The meeting opened at 6:30 with a report by Pete Cameron on a phone call made to the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) about the possibility of aquifer recharge wells here in Union County. This had been the topic at January's meeting and Delbert Smith and Duke Emerson had accepted the task of exploring this option with county landowners and Pete called to gauge the receptivity at the WMD. Pete spoke with Dale Jenkins who said that such projects were expensive and time-consuming, (he was basically pouring cold water on the idea), which was a surprise to Pete, who felt that such projects would be highly welcome given the WMD's currently expressed need for aquifer recharge. Members of the board felt that Jenkins's reaction did not truly represent the mood at the SRWMD. Delbert Smith said that any potential aquifer recharge projects generated in Union County would be presented to the WMD by Hugh Thomas, thereby ensuring a fair hearing.

The subject of aquifer recharge and the nature of the aquifer in general consumed the majority of the time in the meeting. Delbert Smith reported that he had contacted landowners about drilling recharge wells on their property and that four landowners agreed to the possibility of allowing drilling for a soil core sample on their land once they were satisfied about the procedure. His idea was that if the core sample revealed the feasibility of recharge, SRWMD funding might be provided to excavate a trench and fill it with gravel and sand, thus facilitating recharge during flooding events and filtration of the storm water. Pete brought up that this procedure sounded like it would recharge the surficial aquifer and not the Floridan aquifer. Was there, in fact, a confining layer between the surficial aquifer, down to about 80 feet, and the Upper Floridan Aquifer below that? Delbert's view was that water in the surficial aquifer is always percolating down into the Upper Floridan Aquifer. A suggestion was made that the board get a video about the Floridan Aquifer to better inform themselves. The subject of aquifer recharge was left with Delbert's assurance that he would submit the information on the four candidate locations to Hugh Thomas for presentation to the SRWMD, which would provide the appropriate technical knowledge if projects were approved.

Scott Tucker, the Florida Department of Agriculture representative, reported that his department was feeling pressure from the Florida legislature to make sure that farmers who had received cost-share money from the state were performing the steps needed to justify the investment. For their part, FDACS is tasking their representatives to revisit each cost-share participant, verifying progress. Findings to date are that while the farmers are using the Best Management Practices, they are not keeping the records needed to defend their efforts in such cases as the present where there is a legislative challenge. Scott reported that in many cases, the simplest fix is to sit down with the farmer and do the back records together.

Monica Jones, the national resources representative of the federal government, reported that a product of the new farm bill is several consolidations of programs, which she will describe in the upcoming months as new procedures become known.

The meeting closed at 8 PM.