

September 23 Meeting of the Union County Soil and Water Conservation District

Present:

Delbert Smith -- Chair

Pete Cameron -- Deputy Chair, Secretary

Duke Emerson -- Treasurer

Hugh Thomas -- Dept. of Agriculture representative
Monica Jones -- NRCS Representative
Basil Bactawar -- Union County AFIS Agent
Laurel Schaafsma -- Visitor

Laurel Schaafsma was a visitor considering becoming a member of the board.

The meeting opened with a discussion of calf and cattle best management practices in the area of water quality. Hugh Thomas said that when water (streams, brooks) containing manure flows out of a property, there must be an "exclusion zone" of 300 feet, fenced in to prevent cattle from entering and to allow the manure to be filtered. Also mentioned was a raised crossway over the waterway for cattle to prevent them from entering the water.

Delbert spoke about a water recharge project that is under consideration by the board, to be performed in collaboration with the water management district, which is currently interested in such projects. Members wanted more information about exactly what is involved in water recharge. Delbert said that excess storm water is often pooled where there is a low spot on the terrain that has a clay layer beneath, which prevents it from percolating downwards. The first step in a recharge project is to take a core soil sample from the surface down into the surficial aquifer (@90 feet) to determine what is below the clay layer. If there is sand below the clay, a hole could be dug through the clay layer and filled with aggregate (small stones). The pooled storm water would then move through the stones and through the sand below, being filtered (cleaned) during the process. It would end up in the surficial aquifer where it could be used during dry times for irrigation or other uses. It remains for Delbert to contact Dale Jenkins in the water management district to move this project forward.

Delbert reiterated our goal of finding means of reaching and influencing Union County students and teachers. He said that the schools have a good agriculture program, but we currently have not found a means of getting involved in it. Hugh Thomas pointed out that the water management district has grants up to \$2K for water projects. He mentioned a grant that went to Alachua County schools to conserve water in a school greenhouse, grow vegetables on raised beds, and test water quality in a hydroponic setup. Duke Emerson said that our high school is trying to get a new greenhouse constructed but needs help and maybe we could apply for a grant. He said that he will look into this and see if we can help. While this is not a water conservation effort per se, it represents a start towards having an influence in the high school Ag program.

The topic of aquaponics came up. This is a relatively new idea in combining hydroponics with fish farming. In this setup, fish living in the hydroponics water supply provide waste that fertilizes the plants. Questions arose about food safety and whether this system could be used commercially or just in private homes.

Hugh Thomas thought the board might be interested to know that a challenge to the water management district's minimum flows and levels in the lower Santa Fe basin was upheld in court because the flow data had not been obtained far enough back in the historical record.

At the end of the meeting, Basil said that the county commission had authorized a budget for the board for the next fiscal year.