

2 Horses & A Goat: Are You Agriculture?

Rural Residential Agriculture and Potential Solutions

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Water quality is an important environmental issue in Florida, and many waterbodies are impaired by excessive nutrients. Water quality restoration plans, known as basin management action plans (BMAPs), include urban and agricultural best management practices (BMPs) for non-point sources. In BMAP areas, agricultural producers are required to properly implement the applicable BMPs for their operation. To date, state agencies have focused on the larger, more intensive, and irrigated agriculture operations. The BMP manuals are not generally applicable for smaller operations, such as rural residential properties with some acreage and an agricultural or residential zoning classification. (Other names for these small-scale agricultural operations include residential agriculture, rural estates, equine communities, ranchettes, or urban agriculture.)

The increasing number of these parcels with nontraditional agricultural production represents a growing component of unenrolled acreage with no BMPs for nutrient management. While the loading of nutrients associated with each individual property can be small, collectively, this category of sources can significantly impact some waterbodies. And the existing regulatory scheme of creating BMAPs and BMP manuals is not a good match for this widespread, diffuse source of nutrient pollution—the practices applicable to large, industrial-scale agriculture cannot be implemented at the homestead level, and the agencies do not have the resources to pursue enrollment and enforcement at tens of thousands of small farms.

Our practicum met with stakeholders to help define these operations, to understand what practices and options are available for operations of this size, and to explore outreach approaches that would be most impactful.