



March 13, 2009

Farm Bureau Day Activities

Farm Bureau Day activities in Tallahassee will be held on Monday and Tuesday, March 16 and 17.

The festivities begin with a briefing dinner at the Tallahassee Antique Car Museum on Monday at 6:30 p.m. Our speakers will be Sen. Thad Altman, R-Melbourne, chair of the Senate Finance and Tax Committee, and Rep. Trudi Williams, R-Ft. Myers, chair of the House Ag and Natural Resources Policy Committee. Cost is \$10 per person. Dress is casual. ***Reservations are required.***

On Tuesday, members are invited to take a private tour of the Governor's mansion and the Supreme Court. The tour of the mansion is from 1:30 – 2:00 pm. The Supreme Court tour will be from 3:00 - 3:30 pm and will be led by Justice Charles Canady. ***Reservations are required for both events.***

Please make appointments with your legislators while you are here and invite them to our reception.

Because of the gift ban, legislators, staff, and other governmental employees have to pay to attend the reception. The cost is \$10 for those wanting a full buffet, or \$5 for those opting for light fare. Those choosing not to partake at all are welcome to visit for free.

Tickets are available at your local county Farm Bureau office. The cost is \$10 each.

For more information or to make reservations for the briefing dinner or one of the tours, contact Chris Scovotto at (850) 222-2557. Limited space is still available for all events.

Budget Blues

Florida's declining economy is not news to anyone these days. The real question at hand is not if the economic news is bad, but rather just how bad is it?

The Revenue Estimating Council, the group that determines the financial projections the legislature uses to configure its budget, is expected to have an answer to that question on Friday, March 13.

Friday the 13th is not a date traditionally known for the good luck it brings. It appears that this Friday will be no different. The current multibillion dollar decrease in revenue is expected to grow substantially, requiring even more cost-cutting and program losses than have already been experienced.

Some fear it will also require increases in fees and taxes or the repeal of sales tax exemptions.

Under the leadership of Rep. Ellyn Bogdanoff, R- Fort Lauderdale, the House Finance and Tax Council has held a series of meetings reviewing 50 selected sales tax exemptions. Three exemptions directly affected agriculture: lands leased for agriculture, fill dirt and fish breeding. Farm Bureau testified in defense of those exemptions. It appears that those exemptions are safe and will not be repealed.

Sen. Thad Altman will lead his Finance and Tax Committee in a similar exercise next week. The Senator is a strong believer in ag's sales tax exemptions, so we remain positive as to the outcome of their review in his committee as well.

Senate Ag Committee

Although the complete agenda for next week's Ag Committee meeting has not been released, Farm Bureau has been given advance notice that two of our priority bills will be heard.

SB 1974 by Sen. Mike Bennett

- ◆ Duplication of Regulation by Local Governments / Stormwater Utility Fees: Prohibits local governments from enforcing duplicate regulations on agricultural lands. Also prohibits counties from imposing tax assessment or fees for stormwater management on ag lands, or when a farmer has a discharge permit or implements BMPs.
- ◆ Nonresidential Farm Buildings / Fences: Exempts nonresidential farm buildings and fences from any type of permits or fees.
- ◆ Agriculture Use Notice and Waiver: Requires anyone applying for a land use permit, building permit or occupancy permit for non-agricultural land abutting or within 1000 feet of agricultural land to sign a waiver indicating they understand that the agricultural land is an ongoing operation which produces odors, noise, dust and other effects.

SB 2312 Sen. Charlie Dean

- ◆ Local Business Tax Exemption for Ag: Exempts farmers and ranchers from a local business tax (occupational license). Persons are now exempt but not companies or corporations.
- ◆ Ag Plastics: Allows the burning of all plastics, including tubing, used on a farm.
- ◆ Farm Tractor / Vehicle: Exempts from license requirements operators of motor vehicles used primarily on a farm (implements, all-terrain vehicles, utility vehicles, golf carts, etc) and operated on state roads only incidentally.
- ◆ Best Management Practices: Allows the Department of Agriculture to adopt rules to establish comprehensive best management practices for ag production and food safety.

The Ag Committee is chaired by Sen. Charlie Dean, R-Inverness. It is scheduled to meet from 10:30 am – 12:30 pm on Tuesday, March 17, in Room 37 of the Senate Office Building.

Senate Environmental Preservation Committee

The Senate Environmental Preservation Committee, chaired by Sen. Lee Constantine, R-Altamonte Springs, is expected to hear a controversial bill on springs protection at its next meeting.

SB 274, sponsored by the Committee Chair, originally would have implemented a pilot program creating protection zones for four springs. Sen. Constantine announced this week that he is dropping the pilot program concept and expanding the bill to include the entire state.

Farm Bureau opposes a large protection zone around any spring in Florida because of its impact on private property rights and agricultural production. The impact of a program creating large protection zones around every spring in Florida is unfathomable.

The Committee is scheduled to meet Tuesday, March 17, from 10:30 am – 12:30 pm in Room 401 of the Senate Office Building.

Other Committee Meetings of Interest

Other committee meetings that might be of interest to members attending Farm Bureau Day:

House (Held in House Office Building)

8 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Ag/Natural Resources Policy, 1st Floor
Energy/Utilities Policy Council, Basement

2:15 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Natural Resources Appropriations, Room 306

Senate (Held in Senate Office Building)

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Communications/Energy/Utilities, Room 301

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