

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District

Meeting Minutes

June 8, 2022

Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Dover, FL

SUPERVISORS IN ATTENDANCE

Kathy Eckdahl - Chair
Andrew Brooks - Vice Chair
Sonja Brookins - Treasurer
Karen Cox Jaroch - Supervisor
Mark Proctor - Supervisor

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Betty Jo Tompkins - HSWCD Executive Director
Linda Chion - HSWCD/PT Computer Graphics
Simon Bollin - Hills Ag. Economic Development
Jeff Whealton - SWFWMD
Ken Grilner - SWFWMD
Thomas Stevens - SWFWMD
Leslie Alvarez-Diaz - NRCS, Dist. Conservationist
Walter Albarran - NRCS Area Conservationist
Starr Brookins - Attendee
Kim O'Connor - Attendee

CALL TO ORDER

Kathy Eckdahl, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm.

MINUTES

BROOKINS moved for approval of April 13, 2022 HSWCD board minutes. BROOKS seconded.
Motion passed.

TREASURES REPORT

BROOKINS, treasurer, reviewed the financials.

- General bank account: \$1,571.28 Balance as of June 7, 2022
- Hillsborough 100 account: \$10,028.85 as of June 7, 2022
- Mini-Farms account: \$78,198.51 as of June 7, 2022
- Tampa Bay Regional Envirothon account: \$395.66 as of May 31, 2022

TOMPKINS explained the fluctuation in the mini-farms account is due to the fact that FDACS advances monies annually. Then after the producers have completed and paid for their project, HSWCD reimburses the producer for their cost share percentage. The next step is reimbursement by FDACS to HSWCD for the monies paid by HSWCD to the producer and the administrative fee.

PROCTOR inquired about the Hillsborough 100 account related to the allocations made from the 2021 Great Plant Auction TOMPKINS mentioned the breakdown offered and approved following the Great Plant Auction, including the Katie Tyson scholarship that will be paid directly to the school, money for poster and speech contest prizes and more.

TOMPKINS reported in 2022 the Hillsborough 100 tabloid was produced at a cost of only \$400 to HSWCD with the balance paid by advertisers. This included distribution in the Sunday edition of the Tampa Bay Times on April 24, 2022, distribution in TBT April 28, 2022 and a several thousand overrun for distribution at fairs, festivals, schools and other events. TOMPKINS noted that the tabloid gives the

district great leverage and that it was produced this year without raising advertising costs. Advertising by government agencies included, but was not limited to: the property appraiser, tax collector, supervisor of election, EPC. Plan Hillsborough, county and city of Tampa solid waste and water departments and others.

BROOKS moved to approve financials and file for audit. JARoch seconded. Motion passed.

NRCS REPORT

DIAZ-ALVAREZ reported 52 applications received, with 24 approved, representing approx. \$1,159,589 for 2022. Applications included forest plans, cover crops, grazing, irrigation, etc. Also, two conservation stewardship applications approved for \$27,876 allocated this year and that she would like to secure more applications. If anyone needs assistance, let her know.

NRCS is requiring masks in the building at this time due to COVID increase. Visitors are welcome with a mask. Supervisors signed annual civil rights materials and made sure policy statements are in place in downtown Plant City offices.

ALVARRAN clarified the upcoming layout of the Plant City office. This involved NRCS 150-square-foot space for each employee. NRCS is getting new furniture. HSWCD expressed concern that NRCS had a new design for the layout of the offices without any input whatsoever from HSWCD.

TOMPKINS noted that HSWCD space appears to be reduced considerably, and that 450ft includes space in the hallway. ALVARRAN said the Plant City lease is set to renew in 2026 and that they're going to get new furniture prior to lease renewal. He also said in working in partnership with the district "we only provide space in exchange for different types of services from the district". Those services include technical assistance from the district to meet Farm Bill activities.

TOMPKINS reported that the district has been responsible for promoting NRCS programs, projects, and activities. She also noted that "there is probably no district in the state of Florida that does more." noting the district's involvement in fairs, festivals, educational events, trade shows, and more. She added that HSWCD transports and sets up NRCS materials and exhibits at such events as the Florida State Fair (12 days), Florida Strawberry Festival (11 days), and Hillsborough County Fair (8 days).

TOMPKINS discussed the two Local Working Groups meetings held in 2021 and that HSWCD secured the location, provided food, and printed materials that were of excellent quality. In the past, TOMPKINS said HSWCD had secured access to NRCS records to call people to invite to the meetings, resulting in attendance in excess of 50 people, but now that information is no longer shared with the district.

ALVARRAN reported that access will be given.

BROOKINS said NRCS and HSWCD should get together and work out the space situation, and that once done, asked to get the schematics "to see the space and see if it is workable".

TOMPKINS invited DIAZ-ALVAREZ to the AFCS Area 4 Meeting. ALVARRAN said he would be in attendance as DIAZ-ALVAREZ would be in Puerto Rico.

FDACS REPORT

WARREN was not in attendance

SWFWMD

GRINER gave the Ag Advisory report, noting that a hot topic for everybody concerned is that mini-farms may go up to 10K and hopes it goes through. WHEALTON reported that the SWFWMD Ag Team is really excited that the Ag Soil Program is picking up. He said the new NRCS positions in Plant City will be instrumental and ALVARRAN is correct about the percentage of projects and that is a "good solid eight

out of ten” are in Hillsborough County. WHEALTON reported that Lumke has retired. The new Ag engineer is Thomas Stevens and all contracts are “up and renewed”. WHEALTON can’t attend the AFCD Area 4 meeting, but will attempt to secure other SWFWMD representation.

AGRIBUSINESS REPORT

BOLLIN reported considerable activity. He noted that the ag industry did unanimously support increasing the mini-farms program from 8K to 10K and that it would go to the full board next time it meets.

BOLLIN said he sees at least one project a week from Ag barn permit exemptions and that he only sees the ones with questions. Spring Hops Field Day was held and about 50 people attended. Half were brewers, half were prospective or current growers of hops. This year’s crop was of good quality, good yield. He also reported dealing with comprehensive plan issues and special session on affordable housing. He noted the new overlay district proposed for Lithia, the Lithia Pinecrest Overlay District, from Manatee to Polk County Line, to Keystone Road around Wimauma. Ag is exempt and residential buildings are exempt.

REQUEST FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS

SB 1078 Information

TOMPKINS reported 11:59 a.m. June 17 was the deadline for candidates to qualify for the upcoming election for the HSWCD Board of Supervisors. She noted that every single board member needs to run again, even if elected to a four-year term, as recently passed legislation requires. She said the governor has approximately two weeks to make a decision regarding signing the bill. (SB 1078) and that if he does not do so before the qualifying deadline, she believes a special election will be required.

Discussion ensued about the ethical questions concerning SB 1078 and its “punitive nature”, and whether the existing board members would meet the new qualifications for their seats per SB 1078.

A poll was taken to see who intended to run. BROOKS noted he did not intend to run again. ECKDAHL said no. BROOKINS is undecided. PROCTOR indicated yes. JORACH is undecided, “until I see what happens.” TOMPKINS said if we do not have qualifying candidates in line to fill the seats as needed, districts could be abolished.

TOMPKINS reported that the state office has not asked if supervisors throughout the state would be qualified for their seats. JAROCH asked if there was a provision that would pass to open up the qualifications if no one qualifies for a seat. Issue not yet clarified.

The issue of sharing a lobbyist came up. JAROCH said if we were sharing a lobbyist, districts might not have the same issues. BROOKS and PROCTOR both agreed it was too late for a lobbyist.

JAROCH raised the issue of hiring a lawyer to represent the board, or hiring a lobbyist.

BROOKS moved to deny hiring a lobbyist, PROCTOR second. Motion passed.

AME CHURCH

TOMPKINS reported she presented information on a zoom meeting to the AME church in Lakeland regarding Operation Pollination in conjunction with Rotary. They have a big community garden they are starting at their church.

EPA

Over 1,000 letters were received opposing EPA’s initial plan to ban the fungicide Thiram for use on strawberries. As a result, EPA is taking four to six months to review the issue to make a determination. Also, EPA is set to review data collection that contradicts their thoughts on the product in question. The

Florida Strawberry Growers Association stood in opposition of the ban and did an outstanding job following up on this critical issue. HSWCD submitted correspondence to EPA in support of FSGA.

AFCS DUES

HSWCD owes membership dues to the Association of Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD). TOMPKINS said if the district does not pay its dues, it is not eligible to apply for certain grants, and that HSWCD in the past has received a 50K urban grant. She noted that the National Association of Conservation Districts relies on state associations to make grant recommendations. She said HSWCD has funds in the county budget to pay for association dues.

BROOKINS moved to pay to have a voice, whether we agree or not. ECKDAHL seconded the motion. BROOKINS agreed to incorporate into her motion language to say dues were being paid under duress and BROOKS said that was a good compromise. ECKDAHL said we will pay the AFCS dues under duress to support BROOKINS and district programs.

BROOKINS moved, ECKDAHL seconded, Motion passed. Proctor dissented.

NACD DUES

PROCTOR moved to pay \$800 in NACD dues. BROOKS seconded. Motion passed.

TOMPKINS REPORT *

- AFCD Area 4 meeting is June 18 at FSGA in Dover with HSWCD hosting. Continental breakfast and lunch to be served and gift bags presented. Tour has been canceled.
- Ag Venture was successful (14 classes and 320 kids)
- NACD/HSWCD "Healthy Soil, Healthy Life" Poster Contest - winning posters will go to area competition
- HSWCD Summer Poster Contest - June 10 to Sept 10 ("Our Perfect Pollinators") Same arrangement as in the past, entrants receive a ticket to the Hillsborough County Fair, where posters will be on display.
- Environthon and Land Judging contests to return.
- Hillsborough 100 ongoing. 2022 Tabloid cost to HSWCD \$400 with advertising covering the balance.
- Operation Pollination is a new two-year HSWCD initiative, running from April 2022-April 2024.
- Spring Ag Tour - TOMPKINS did not attend because of Ag Venture obligations. Attended by BROOKS and BROOKINS
- HSWCD participated in the Clean Air Fair on May 5, 2022 in downtown Tampa.
- FCDEA/AFCD quarterly meeting July 1, Best Western Gateway, Gainesville Florida
- Annual AFCD meeting Sept 7-9, Gainesville, Florida
- NACD summer meeting July 15-19, Puerto Rico

*Full report attached

Meeting Adjourned

Dinner Served