

HILLSBOROUGH SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Board of Supervisors District Regular Meeting

Wednesday, December 9, 2020 * 4:30 PM

Florida Strawberry Growers Association

Meeting called to order at 4:45 PM by Chairman Mark Proctor

Supervisors in attendance:

Michael Hepburn, Vice Chair
Susan Dumke, Treasurer
Andrew Brooks, Supervisor
Kathy Eckdahl, Supervisor

Incoming Supervisor :
Sonja Brookins

Others in attendance:

Betty Jo Tompkins, HSWCD, Executive Director
Linda Chion, HSWCD Computer Graphics
Stephanie Collins, HSWCD Community Outreach
Jeff Whealton, SWFWMD Ag Team Manager
Ken Griner, SWFWMD Project Engineer
Leslie Diaz-Alvarez, NRCS Dist Con (via zoom)
Simon Bolin, Agribusiness Development Manager
Sheila McNamara, Hills Co Sustainability (zoom)

INTRODUCE MEMBER(S) OF THE PUBLIC

Chair requested members and guests introduce themselves and offer public comment.

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 30, 2020 REGULAR MEETING

Supervisor Brooks moved approval of September 30, 2020 Board Meeting Minutes. Motion 2nd by Supervisor Eckdahl. Motion passed unanimously.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer's report presented by Supervisor Dumke. Supervisors reviewed financial statement packages from all four HSWCD accounts covering September 30, 2020 to November 30, 2020. Due to COVID 19 cancellation, Tampa Bay Envirothon, recorded no transactions during entire year with balance of \$295.66. Other account balances: Hillsborough 100 account, \$4,058.90; Mini Farms account \$66,189.23; General account \$11866.46. Executive Director Betty Jo Tompkins clarified that the bank statements and reconciliation sheets do not always show the same amount because of checks written, but not cashed.

Minimal transactions as P-Card active and major purchases done thru P-Card. Motion from Supervisor Eckdahl to accept and file for audit. Motion 2nd by Supervisor Brooks. Motion passed unanimously.

NRCS REPORT

Leslie Diaz-Alvarez, new District Conservationist (reporting January 2021) reported via zoom.

NRCS only had 11 applications in system for latest funding such as grazing – 1, farm energy- 2 and some high tunnels. This funding was to help with high tunnels, forest improvement, grazing, pasture planting and more. Conservation Stewardship received no applications. Program designed so approved applicants could receive funds if conservation practices were implemented. Concern expressed as to

how to provide information to growers regarding availability of programs to take advantage of all opportunities. All cost share caps have been removed for 2021. Project implementation must be four years or less

Director Tompkins commented that she, Leslie and Area Conservationist Walter Albarran have been communicating about funds potentially available for strawberries and blueberries. Unfortunately, due to a very short timetable, Tompkins only had one-week lead time to alert growers. She provided information to FSGA who sent an email out to growers and Collins was able to get the information publicized in AgNewsToday.com . Betty Jo is confident there will be real movement now that money is available, and the percentage is so high. NRCS target is to increase participation in Hillsborough County as the County is #1 in the State for fruit trees and berries. Chairman Proctor pointed out the Census data in their books.

AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT REPORT

Simon Bollin, Agribusiness Development, reported that hops were harvested the 2nd week of November at the research station. While there were good quality hops reported with the Cascade variety, the yield was not as good as the National average. Ag building permits were very high this year. Supervisor Dumke inquired as to the profit generation per acre for hops. Simon indicated USDA is doing economic surveys which show that the cost per acre is higher in Florida due to more input costs. For hops to be economically viable for Florida growers, a higher price per pound for hops will be needed. Supervisor Dumke questioned if Fresh from Florida had any marketing programs or dollars available for hops growers. Bollin indicated he knew of none. Funding or sponsorship is needed to research hops pelletizer. A lot of brewers are able to use whole hops in their process, but the hops need to be pelletized. The Veterans Florida Ag Program has received a grant for \$750,000 . Program available to veterans or transition military personnel seeking potential agricultural careers. Gulf Coast Research Lab is currently recruiting for 11 interns.

SWFWMD REPORT

Jeff Whealton, SWFWMD reported he is part of the ag outreach, environmental and engineering team that handles 16 Florida counties. SWFWMD helps growers secure assistance. Whealton explained that their flagship program is AGSWIM. It is a 30-year-old program that dates to a period when there were many lawsuits and compliance issues. SWFWMD is exploring ideas to help growers out and is early in the process of developing a task force to look at Dover water use caution area. There is a need to go back and re-evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the current one.

Ken Griner, SWFWMD Project Engineer, reported the SWFWMD Farms Group has money available for conservation and other projects to save water. They are working with FDACS and NRCS. If anyone is considering water conservation projects for their farm, please advise.

FDACS REPORT

BMP new rule change as to collecting total nitrogen and phosphorus records was discussed. Holmberg Farms is converting to drip from overhead irrigation with a cost share program.

Hillsborough County Sustainability Program

Sheila McNamara, Hillsborough County Sustainability Manager, presented a PowerPoint to illustrate the many sustainability programs available to the public. She covered many topics ranging from solar power, wastewater, recycling etc. Concern was expressed that many are not aware of all the programs nor assistance available. Ms. McNamara covered loans for low- or moderate-income people to help with new roofs, HVAC units, door and window insulation etc. She further described sustainability workshops, Hillsborough County's transportation fleet becoming more sustainable, chiller plants, replacing lighting with LED and more. She stated a pilot composting project is being expanded to 5 acres. The county wants to encourage community gardens, cooking oil recycling and people pledging to reduce single use items. Hillsborough County has one of the largest land conservation programs in Florida overseeing over 63,000 acres of land. She further reported on the mosquito fish program, curbside recycling, encouraging the public to landscape more naturally and Hillsborough's trail and park system. Currently, Hillsborough County is developing a Community Sustainability Action Plan and asking for input from residents, stakeholders, businesses etc. The County wants people to be aware, hear their concerns and see what programs they would be interested in, as well as developing partnerships. This is a long-term sustainability initiative and everyone is encouraged to take the survey. Chairman Proctor thanked Sheila for her very thorough report.

REQUEST FOR NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

Business:

- A. Introduction of new staff- Stephanie Collins – Community Outreach Technician (20 hours weekly)
- B. Selection process for new Administrative Services position explained by Director Tompkins. .
- C. Mobile Irrigation Lab Technician Position available– Director Tompkins wrote and won a grant for this position of \$49,000. Purpose is to look for ways to save water in urban and suburban communities. Position will be filled on contract basis, not hourly. For instance, technician will be given x number of sites to evaluate.
- D. Website report - Linda Chion, HSWCD, Computer Graphics Designer explained new website now live.
- E. Education Programs – Director Tompkins reported on poster contests from 2020 and for 2021. Two contests held in 2020 : “Where Would We Be Without Pollinators” and “Save Water, Live Stronger”. Winning bee posters were forwarded to State Contest and Hillsborough students won second and third place. All students to receive individualized certificates, a free ticket to the 2021 Hillsborough County Fair and will have their poster on display. Water posters judged following meeting, with the same recognitions. The 2021 poster theme will be “Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities”, with posters due in March. Contacts at area schools currently underway for both poster and speech contests.
- F. Envirothon – Currently on hold, along with Land Judging Contest and Ag Venture, due to COVID.
- G. Corn Maze – Fox Squirrel Corn Maze held in October with HSWCD exhibit and craft activity of water cycle bracelets (with 150 kits distributed).

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director Tompkins reported on the following:

- A. AFCD State Meeting in Ft. Walton attended by Tompkins and Supervisor Brooks. Events included dinner and FCDEA Silent Auction.
- B. FCDEA – Presented comprehensive survey of Florida Conservation Districts at State meeting, worked on plans for Farm Bureau Legislative Day & FCDEA mid-year meeting in Tallahassee.
- C. SECDEA – Participated in annual meeting held via zoom.
- D. Hillsborough County Sustainability Plan – Participated in Open House, Survey and Focus groups covering agricultural organizations, environmental organizations, community partners, governmental organizations and community food systems.
- E. NACD 2021 Annual Meeting February 1 – 10, 2021 via zoom. Director Tompkins selected as a “presenter”, with taping in January and live program in February.
- F. NACD 2022 Annual Meeting February 11 – 15th in Orlando. Tompkins to serve on host committee. Possible farm tours in Hillsborough County (middle of strawberry season and Florida State Fair).
- G. Florida State Fair – secured complimentary exhibit space in Ag Hall of Fame. Activities will be determined at a later date based on COVID status.
- H. Florida Strawberry Festi – March 4 – 14, 2021 – complimentary exhibit space – Grimes Bldg..
- I. 2021 Hillsborough 100 Conservation Challenge – April 17, 2021 – May 9, 2021. Tabloid to be published by the Tampa Bay Times, Sunday, April 18th and Thursday, April 22, 2021 in TBT. Planning for projects underway.
- J. ESRAG – Participated in activities with international conservation/environmental group and in Biodiversity Task Force.
- K. Participated in Hillsborough County Farm Bureau and Florida Farm Bureau Annual Meeting.
- L. Other Activities: Filmed television program on HSWCD with ABC Action News; Chambers; Community Roundtable; Hillsborough County 4-H Foundation; Hillsborough County fair; Rotary Club of Brandon South Global; Coalition of Community Gardens; Rep Executive Com .

ELECTIONS

Supervisor Eckdahl nominated Supervisor Hepburn for Chair; seconded by Supervisor Brooks. Passed unanimously. Supervisor Hepburn nominated Supervisor Eckdahl for Vice-Chair; seconded by Supervisor Brooks. Passed unanimously. Supervisor Hepburn nominated Supervisor Brooks for Treasurer; seconded by Supervisor Eckdahl. Passed unanimously.

ANNUAL REVIEW

Board moved to Executive Session to conduct annual review of Executive Director Tompkins. Following discussion Board scored Tompkins with 5 out of 5, then approved a 5% raise by unanimous vote.

Public Correspondence, Upcoming Events, Announcements and Adjournment.

Next Board Meeting scheduled for February 3, 2021. Meeting Adjourned, followed by Dinner.