

REGIONAL RURAL LANDS SYMPOSIUM

The Future of the Region's Countryside

December 5, 2003

(Schreiber Conference Center at St. Lucie West)
Sponsored by the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council

A NEW BEGINNING

December 5, 2003, marked a watershed day in the evolution of Florida's Treasure Coast. It was the first coming together of some 200-plus community leaders and interested citizens to discuss the future of the region's countryside. The day's goal was to provide a firm foundation for a much longer community discussion about the future of the region's countryside by enabling participants to share information and learn from the experiences of other regions that have been successful in saving the countryside.

The message from the participants was clear - the Treasure Coast's countryside is at risk unless bold changes are made in regional growth patterns.

THE REGIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The Regional Framework

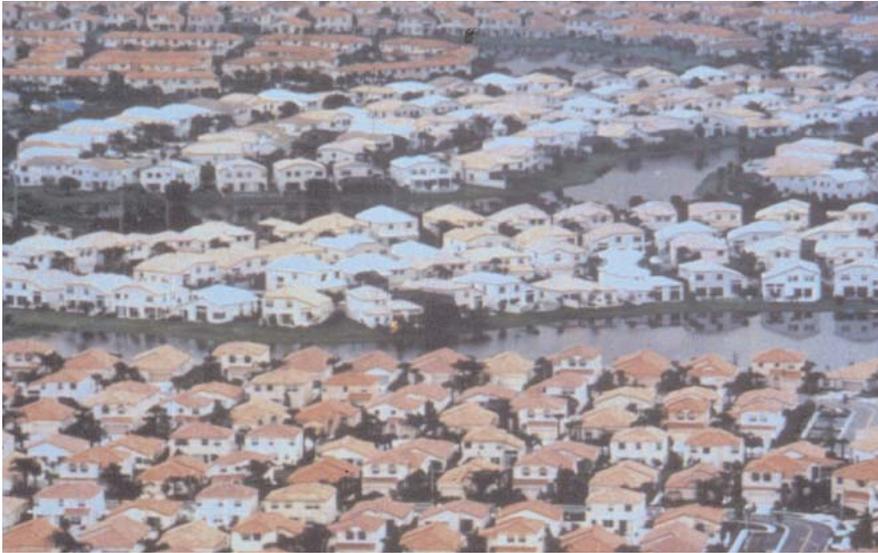
The Treasure Coast region is experiencing rapid population growth. Its 1.5 million population today will increase to over 2.0 million in just the next ten years. However, unlike its neighbors to the south, much of the Treasure Coast Region is still characterized by large expanses of agriculture and natural areas and communities that offer a small town way of life. Whether these current conditions continue will be determined by how future growth is accommodated.

This event has been a long time coming. The number of people here today demonstrates that there is a lot of concern about the future of the region's countryside and a true commitment to raising the bar for how things happen in the countryside and for doing things a little better than we have seen in the last two decades. While we all fumble through our in-boxes on to the next emergency, this issue looms large. We need to get ahead of this issue and address it while we can. (Michael Busha, Executive Director, Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council)

It is going to take a true collaborative effort from all of us - developers, farmers, citizens, and public officials - if we are to really plan for the landscape of our countryside. The Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council should be commended for having the foresight to bring everyone together to start looking at what we want our communities and surrounding countryside to be like in 10, 20, or 50 years. (Joe Negron, Florida House of Representatives, District 82)

The choices are clear:

- Continue with the current trend, where communities grow together with continuous development, roads become congested, and farmland disappears, or:
- Reshape the current pattern and structure of development, as called for in the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council's Strategic Regional Policy Plan, into a mosaic of towns and villages, each surrounded by agricultural and natural lands and linked together by an interconnected road network.



We have all the parts and pieces of what we need to have an informed conversation. What we haven't done is sit down together in a room and see how they all fit together. For elected officials to take the chance, the support has to come from the grass-roots. Let us use today as the foundation for much larger community conversation. (Peter Sypke, Rural Lands Stewardship Council Member)

Left: The current trend of development: Continuous development and farmland disappears.

The second option would result in agriculture and the countryside being a vital part of the South Florida ecosystem and a major contributor to residents' quality of life. Agriculture is linked to communities through the many amenities it provides: open space and biodiversity, food for urban and rural residents, mitigation of the environmental and resource impacts of development, and water storage.



Left: Urban Agriculture remains a vital part of the ecosystem and provides many amenities to the community.

The Treasure Coast Counties

The four Treasure Coast counties have much in common: explosive population growth, pressures on urban service areas, escalation of ranchette developments in agricultural areas, and concerns about loss of farmland. The way the Treasure Coast counties plan for the growth that is coming and the policies and regulations they put in place are the big drivers in the future of the region's countryside.

Explosive rates of population growth:

- Indian River: 121,174 in 2003, up to an estimated 186,200 in 2030.
- Martin: 133,453 in 2003, up to an estimated 203,300 in 2030.
- Palm Beach: 1,200,000 in 2003, up to an estimated 1,908,500 in 2030.
- St. Lucie: 210,000 in 2003, up to an estimated 263,790 in 2030.

Low-density development accelerating consumption of land in urban service areas:

- Indian River: 100,000 acres in the Urban Services Area (USA) located east of I-95 containing 98% of the population. (10,000-15,000 developable acres remain in the USA.)
- Martin: 64,852 acres in the primary USA (generally located east of the Florida Turnpike and the unincorporated Indiantown area) containing 88% of the population. (14,730 developable acres remain in the USA.)
- Palm Beach: 93,000 acres in the Urban/Suburban Tier containing 90% of the population. (39,000 developable acres remaining in these tiers - 24,000 acres in the Eastern Tier and 15,000 acres in the slower growth Glades Urban/Suburban tier.)
- St. Lucie: 111,820 acres within the USA located east of I-95 and containing 92% of the county's population. (33,377 acres of vacant land in the USA.) Outside the USA, the City of Port St. Lucie has annexed 17,306 acres.

We too often equate new development as the cause of the problem, rather than recognizing that it is a market economy response to the public policies and restrictions which we put in place. We need to recognize this and use that knowledge to harness the forces of the market economy to achieve the results we want for our communities. (Craig Evans, Chairman, Florida Rural Land Stewardship Council)

In listening to the presentations today, it is clear that all of our experiences are the same - high population growth coupled with concerns about loss of rural character. The only difference is the name of the county. (Dennis Murphy, Community Development Director, St. Lucie County)

Martin County is located between two growth machines - St. Lucie and Palm Beach counties. People are now moving to our county because of its small town lifestyle. The challenge now is to keep that lifestyle as we accommodate a growing population. (Nicki van Vonno, Planning and Development Director, Martin County)

Majority of farmland is zoned for 5, 10, and 20-acre minimum lots:

- Indian River: 160,200 acres (a majority of land) outside the USA with minimum lot sizes of 5-acres east of I-95 (33,400 acres), 10-acres west of I-95 (78,300 acres) and east of the St. John's Marsh, and 20-acres west of the St. John's Marsh (48,500 acres).
- Martin: 29,963 acres bordering the Urban Services District requiring a 5-acre minimum lot size and 210,366 acres (majority of the land) in the western part of the county requiring a 20-acre minimum lot size. Possible consideration of a bond referendum to acquire development rights and conservation easements to reduce urban sprawl and enhance and restore natural areas.
- Palm Beach: 26,000 acres in the semi-rural Exurban Tier with 2.5-acre lot sizes and a predominant grandfather lot size of 1.25-acres. 83,000 acres in the Rural Tier have lot sizes of 5 to 20 acres and areas dedicated to agriculture have the option of converting to rural residential with a minimum of one unit per 5 or 10-acres. The 21,000-acre Agricultural Reserve Tier requires 5-acre minimum lot sizes, unless developed as a cluster with 60% open space/preserve areas. Forty seven percent of this area has been protected through a combined effort of federal and state agencies and a \$150 million Land Acquisition Program to conserve agricultural and environmentally sensitive lands.
- St. Lucie: 217,021 acres classified for agriculture (a number that is decreasing) generally located west of the Florida Turnpike. The majority of this area (209,850 acres) requires a minimum density of one dwelling unit per 5 acres, and 6,640 acres require a minimum lot size of 2.5 acres (located closer to the USA). 531 acres of agricultural land is in the USA.

The challenge as we plan for growth in the rural part of the county is to preserve the character of existing rural and semi-rural communities and agriculture, and to use waterways and water resources needed for Everglades restoration as amenities for new and existing communities. (Isaac Hoyos, Principal Planner, Palm Beach County Department of Planning)

We have more ranchettes, more abandoned groves, and more land use conflicts. Ranchettes are much harder to serve when the development is so dispersed. New villages and towns are a needed alternative. (Bob Keating, Community Development Director, Indian River County)



Left: A village in the countryside: An alternative approach to development in the Treasure Coast counties.

Escalation of ranchette development in a majority of the region:

- Indian River: Increasing the number of 5-acre plus ranchette developments, particularly around the Urban Service Area (from April to December 2002 added 25 such developments totaling 161 lots and 978 acres).
- Martin: Filling out the area platted for 5-acre lot development, plus experiencing an increase in 20-acre ranchettes in the western part of the county (from 1999-2003 - 3,674 acres of 20-acre lots approved).
- Palm Beach: Issuing building permits in the last two years at the rate of 650-plus building permits per year in the central western rural communities, which have a pattern of 1.25- acre lots in antiquated subdivisions and 5, 10, and 20-acre lot sizes. In addition, agricultural lands in this area are anticipated to develop in the form of 2.5, 5, 10, and 20-acre ranchette-style equestrian developments.
- St. Lucie: Escalation of 5-acre ranchettes in the central part of the county. In the last three years, a total of 271 of ranchettes have been proposed, 83 approved, and 153 are pending approval.

Reality Check

The Economics of Farming:

The message from Florida farmers is clear: despite its benefits to the community, agriculture in the Treasure Coast is in distress. Risks are high and rewards are low, and more and more farmers, seeing no upside to further investment are opting for that last crop: houses. Not coincidentally, the agricultural sectors that are doing well are those related to the region's growth - plant nurseries, sod enterprises, and equestrian operations.

The challenges to Treasure Coast farmers:

- With free trade agreements, growers cannot compete with the lower prices offered by offshore competitors because of higher government subsidies in Europe and lower labor costs and fewer environmental regulations in South America.
- Congress continues to fight country of origin labeling, which removes a competitive edge for growers. Consumers have no way of knowing if the food they buy was grown under the US's strict environmental standards.

Farmers have not had a good run this past 10 years. There is an oversupply of citrus. Farmers cannot compete with third world pricing, and the highest value for land is development. (Carson McGuddy, Chief Appraiser, Farm Credit of South Florida)

The picture for agriculture is not pretty. As a grower the ultimate test is land values. No other industry has taken such a hit in values than land for agricultural uses. With the rewards down and the risks high, there is nothing in citrus that I would plant now. Who's buying? Developers and land speculators. (Nat Roberts, General Manager, Callery - Judge Groves)

I used to say that farming in Palm Beach County was as good as it gets. Now that is changing. Costs are going up, the rewards are going down, and the risks are high. We cannot compete under the current guidelines. For agriculture to stay strong in South Florida, it is important to pay attention to what is going in the big picture. (Rick Roth, Owner, Roth Farms)

- Disease pressures beyond their control can wipe out a whole crop. It only takes one diseased tree in a nearby neighborhood to infect an entire year's crop of citrus trees.
- Farmers are often land rich and cash poor. Liquidation is the only alternative when faced with paying estate taxes or an investor wants to see a higher rate of return during tough economic times.
- As development encroaches closer and closer to farms, "the last person farming" loses when residents of the surrounding neighborhoods complain about everyday farming practices, creating problems for farmers trying to go about the business of farming.

The solution, Treasure Coast farmers agree, to maintaining agriculture in the region's future is to:

- Base community plans on a comprehensive understanding of the interdependent issues associated with agriculture.
- Focus on incentive-based strategies that help farmers keep their land in farming and not have to sell out for development.
- Involve farmers from the earliest stages of planning.

Development Realities:

The development reality is that unless the region supports sustainable patterns of development, the negative consequences of sprawl will continue to push the population further into the countryside, putting additional pressures on an already troubled agricultural economy.

The results of such sprawl would include:

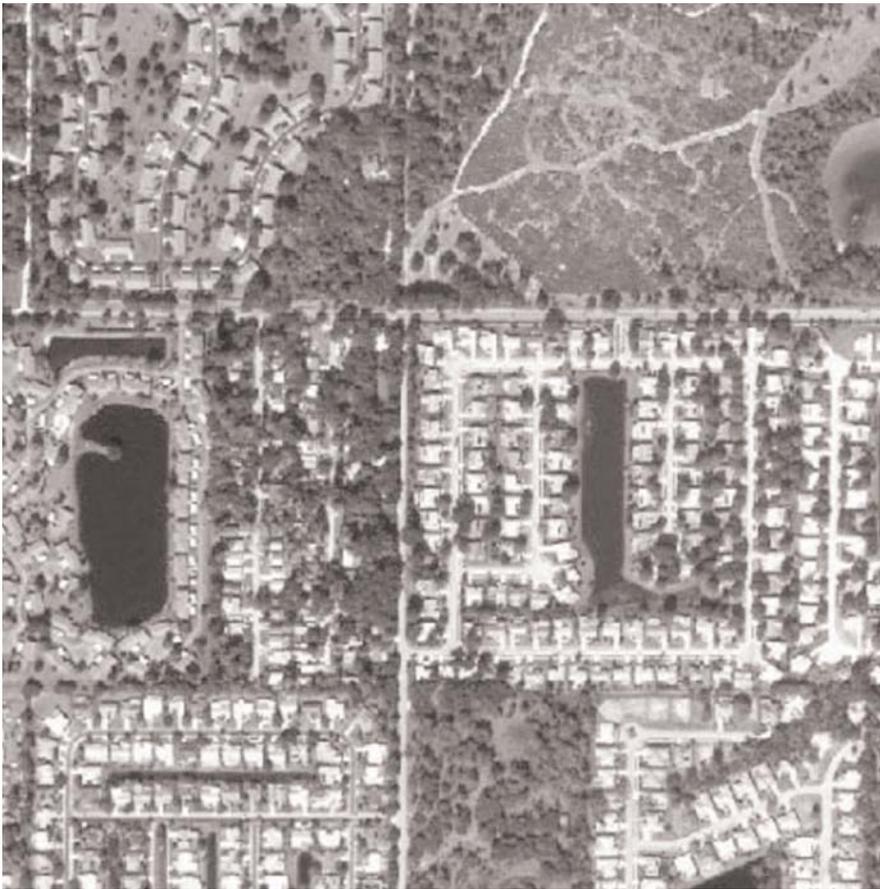
- A housing supply that is short on affordability and availability, which means many people have no choice but to live longer distances from their jobs and city centers.
- Unmanageable traffic, loss of natural environment and open space.
- Inefficient and expensive water, sewer, fire, police, and medical services.

The solutions:

- Plan the big picture and evenly apply solutions.
- Come to grips with density if the children of today are going to be able to afford a home and have green space tomorrow.

Agriculture provides green areas, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and water storage, and helps communities manage their growth. And yet, because of current conditions, even the larger farming operations are a step away from liquidation. When this happens, the land will be broken up and more intense land uses will occur. (Wes Williamson, Vice President, Williamson Cattle Company)

The large land consumption and sprawling patterns of development we see today and the problems it produces are the result of the regulations we put in place. If we are to have a region with a place for everyone, we need to change course. The first step is looking at the big picture, something that we have failed to do, which is why we are here today. (Ron Hyman, Vice President, Sunland Homes)



Left: Sprawl will continue to push the population further into the countryside.

The South Florida Water Management District is acquiring land at an incredible rate, which is having a significant impact on how counties do business. (Chip Merriman, Deputy Executive Director, Resources, South Florida Water Management District)

- Provide for mixed-use rural villages and towns that preserve more open space and create more housing choices.
- Understand and support local agriculture.

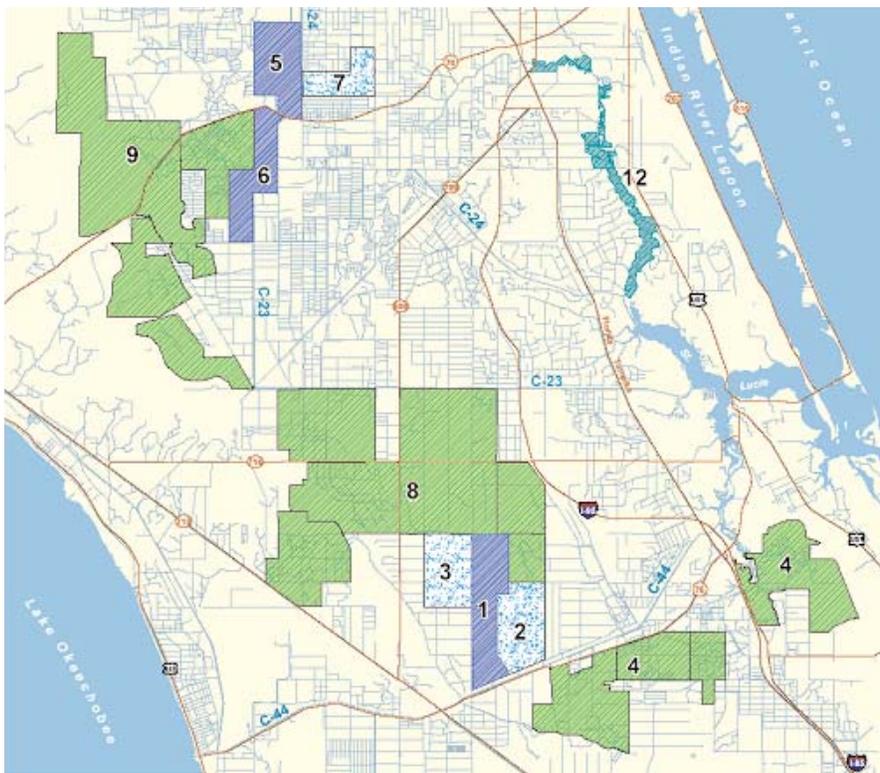
Environmental Realities:

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP), conference participants learned, is important for the sustainability of the region. A big determinant in CERP is land use decisions. Decisions to convert land to development must be evaluated by how they fit into Everglades restoration. Supporting continuing agriculture in the region is also an important part of the equation.

As part of CERP, the South Florida Water Management District is becoming a major landowner in the Treasure Coast region: almost 25,000 acres of citrus and 90,500 acres of pasture have been acquired in the C-44, C-23/24, and C-25 basins. As a result, less land is left for other uses; in a high growth region, that means greater competition for land and increasing land costs.

Successful implementation of the Indian River Lagoon South Project will insure that approximately 20% of the native habitat for this region will be restored and preserved. Concurrently, this project will provide additional water for agricultural use and improve the quality of surface water throughout the region. (David Unsell, Lead Project Manager, South Florida Water Management District)

The biggest environmental issue today is the restoration of the Everglades. The challenge is to make sure that what we are doing on the land side compliments CERP and does not make restoration more difficult and more expensive. Land use decisions cannot be made in a vacuum. They must be considered in the broader context of CERP. (Charles Pattison, Executive Director, 1000 Friends of Florida)



C-44 Basin Components

- 1 C-44 - Reservoir
- 2 C-44 - Stormwater Treatment Area(East)
- 3 C-44 - Stormwater Treatment Area (West)
- 4 Palmar Complex - Natural Storage and Water Quality Area

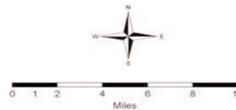
- Natural Floodplain Restoration
- Natural Storage and Water Quality Area
- Reservoir
- Stormwater Treatment Area

C-23/24 Basin Components

- 5 C-23/C-24 - North Reservoir
- 6 C-23/C-24 - South Reservoir
- 7 C-23/C-24 - Stormwater Treatment Area
- 8 Allapattah - Complex Natural Storage and Water Quality Area
- 9 Cypress Creek/Trail Ridge Complex - Natural Storage and Water Quality Area

C-25, Northfork and Southfork Basin Components

- 10 C-25 - Reservoir
- 11 C-25 - Stormwater Treatment Area
- 12 Northfork Natural Floodplain Restoration
- 13 Muck Remediation and Artificial Habitat



Left: Indian River Lagoon.

Current SFWMD acquisition projects in the Treasure Coast region are focused on mitigating the effects of storm water run-off from development on the region's major water bodies and wetland systems, including Indian River Lagoon, shown in the image above.

Citizen Planner Realities:

Some Issues identified by Treasure Coast citizens:

- All stakeholders must be involved if effective solutions are to be found.
- Plans must be based on community values.
- The changing circumstances of the agricultural industry must be considered.

A citizen's advice to planners: find out what the people really want, then focus on how to achieve that within the context of planning goals. What planners want may not be what citizens want. (Mary Dawson, Friends of Martin County)

A new organization, Friends of Martin County, is taking heed of that advice.

- Their goal: To make the county an even better place through positive interaction and dialogue.
- Their challenge: Where to put an estimated 152,000 people in 2010.
- Their concerns: The loss of green space and agriculture, congested traffic, and incompatible development.
- One of their first projects: Help build grassroots support for plans that protect agricultural and natural lands, both within and outside the urban services area.

LEARNING FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES:

A single and very clear message grew out of the day's discussion: communities around the country are taking the bold steps necessary to preserve their countryside for future generations. Although the nature of farming itself might be different, other communities are addressing the same set of issues confronting the Treasure Coast. Lessons from these communities demonstrate that an effective farmland preservation program requires a mix of tools.

Large Lot Zoning and the Countryside: A Lesson from Sarasota County

The bottom line is that Sarasota County's ranchettes, while a lifestyle preference for a part of the population, resulted in significant economic, social, and environmental costs. As a result, in 2002, the county adopted rural villages as an alternative development approach. A major factor in the decision was a study which demonstrated that 5- and 10-acre ranchette developments:

- Meet the definition of sprawl under Florida law. *Rural villages, towns, and activities are an exception to this rule.*
- Accelerates land consumption and fail to accommodate population growth. At ranchette densities, some 200,000 acres are required to accommodate 40,000 households. *At village densities, only 16,000 acres are required to accommodate the same number of households, leaving 127,000 acres for rural heritage and agricultural reserve.*

Tools for Successful Farmland Preservation:

- Involvement of all stakeholder groups in the planning process, beginning with the landowners (the farmers).
- Some kind of growth boundary or urban service area to contain urban and suburban development.
- Incentives to retain land in farming, either market based or providing serious funding for purchase of development rights.
- Strategies that create large contiguous blocks of permanently preserved farmland and provide a clear distinction between town and country.
- Community support of the local agricultural economy.
- Agricultural zoning with large minimum lot sizes to promote the continuation of commercial farming operations.

Regardless of their background, the members of our panel (an Urban Land Institute Advisory Panel) agreed - large-lot or ranchette development was a time bomb in Sarasota County, Florida, and the worst kind of sprawl. Played out over time, no farms were left, no natural areas were left, and traffic congestion escalated. (Dr. Reid Ewing, University of Maryland National Center for Smart Growth)



Left: Lots of asphalt to be amortized

- Provides no alternative to long distance auto travel, placing excessive demands on the regional road network, as residents must hit the road for jobs or services. *Villages decrease travel demands by reducing auto trips by 17%.*
- Produces higher infrastructure costs. *Compared to continuing with ranchettes as the development default in eastern Sarasota County, villages saved \$50 to \$75 million in accumulative infrastructure costs.*
- Fails to protect natural resources and fragments wildlife habitat. *Villages concentrate, rather than scatter, development, thereby creating uninterrupted wildlife corridors.*
- Raises water resource management and water quality issues. Ranchettes are typically on septic systems and chop up natural areas into small tracts of turf. *Villages provide solutions to both these problems by creating more open space and natural areas.*
- Fails to provide affordable housing and promote social diversity. *Villages offer a variety of housing types and densities.*



Left: Affordable housing?

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

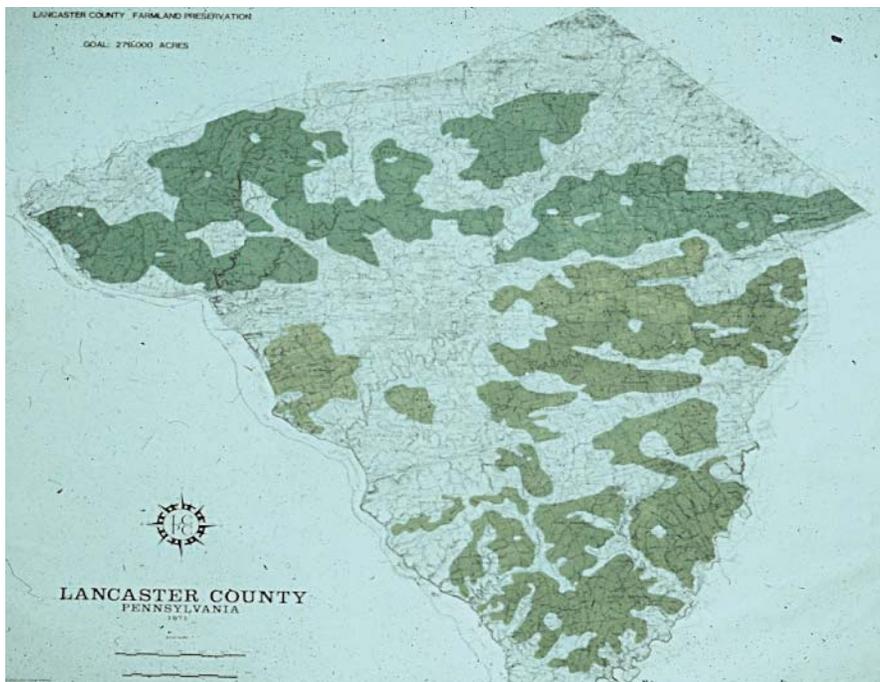
The Challenge:

Lancaster County, like the Treasure Coast counties, has:

- Escalating population growth, putting pressures on built and natural resources.
- A traditionally strong agricultural economy with a major sector (in Lancaster County, dairy) experiencing economic difficulties.
- Sprawl in the countryside from scattered rural residential development that fragments farmland, bids up land prices, and leads to conflicts between farmers and non-farm neighbors.
- A shortage of attractive urban and suburban areas for new development.

The Solution:

In the late 1970s, seeing this trend and the threats to the county's countryside, a visionary farmer named Amos Funk took the lead in pressuring the county to create an Agricultural Preserve Board to implement a farmland protection program. The board's goal was ambitious - preserve in perpetuity 278,000 acres of farmland (illustrated in dark green in the graphic); land that formed the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country.



The best advice to other communities seeking to maintain the country is what we learned in Lancaster County: this is your land, your community, and these are decisions that you have to make. (Tom Daniels, University of Pennsylvania Department of City and Regional Planning)

Left: Map shows in green the 278,000 acres of farmland targeted for preservation by Lancaster County, PA

Their Strategy:

Preserve a critical mass of farmland that would:

- Support the county's agricultural industries.
- Create boundaries around urban areas in places where the richest soils were, thus channeling growth to locations more suitable for development.
- Lancaster County cites two important factors in their success. First, the farmland preservation program began with and still involves the farming community. Second, the program combined regulations with incentives:
 - Adoption of strict agricultural zoning that generally allows one building lot of no more than two acres for every 25 acres.
 - Enactment of a purchase of development rights program, thus enabling farmers to cash out an otherwise non-liquid resource and use that money to reinvest in the farm or pursue other options.

The Result:

Today, Lancaster County has made impressive progress toward its farmland preservation goals:

- 39 of the county's townships have adopted strict agricultural zoning, protecting 350,000 acres of farmland, over half of the county's 600,000 acres.
- 60,000 acres of farmland have been protected through a purchase of development rights program, with applications for the program far exceeding the amount of funding (a current backlog of some 250 applications).
- Residents and farmers alike benefit from the clear edge between houses and farms.



Left: A clear edge between house and farm.

In addition,

- Growth has continued to come to Lancaster County, but now three-quarters of development is occurring within urban growth boundaries.
- The farmland preservation program continues to be broadly supported by a community that views it as an essential economic and quality of life planning tool.

The Bluegrass of Kentucky

The Challenge:

In the mid-1990s, Lexington-Fayette County, a community with great pride in having the country's first urban service boundary and in its world-famous Bluegrass landscape, looked at its future. The trends they saw:

- A continuing high rate of population growth (2 to 3% per year)
- A traditionally productive agricultural economy, but with the future of the tobacco sector in question
- An escalation of 10-acre estate lots that, even with an urban service boundary, were "killing the goose that laid the golden egg."

In an eight-year period, 4,700 acres of Bluegrass farmland were chopped up by 10-acre estate lot developments, accommodating 429 single-family homes. The same number of acres inside the urban service boundary would have accommodated nearly 23,000 residential units at an average density of 4.7 dwelling units per acre.

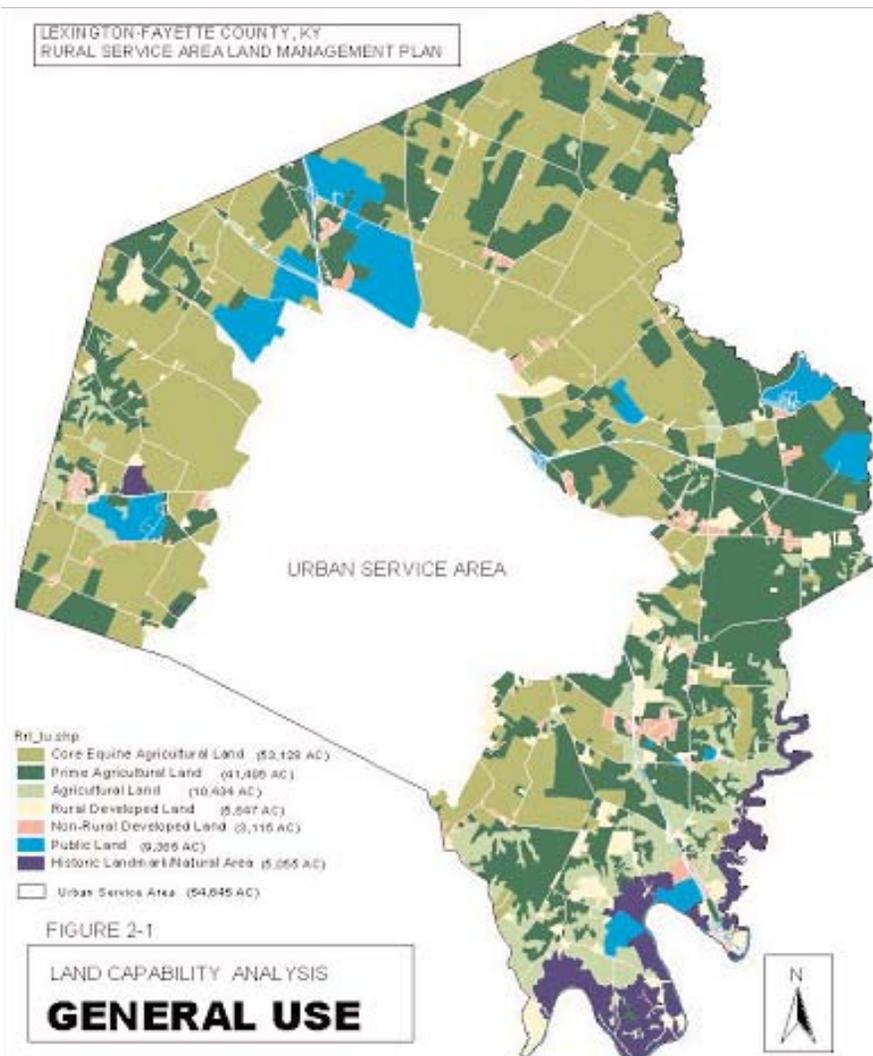
The Solution:

The solution was a Rural Land Management Plan for the county's Rural Service Area, coupled with a purchase of development rights program.

The Plan:

- Brought greater certainty to the future of the countryside by bringing the same level of detailed analysis and planning to the rural services as applied in the past to the urban service area.
- Was developed through a consensus-based planning process which ensured that all key stakeholders, beginning with the farming and development communities, were at the table, felt that their viewpoints were heard fairly, and were comfortable with the outcome.

With its growth in the 1990s, Lexington-Fayette County, the heart of Kentucky's Bluegrass, was forced to look at not only expansion of its Urban Service Boundary, but also at the long-term implications of 10-acre estate lots in the Rural Service Area. We found that 10-acre estate lots in the countryside do not make common sense. (Chris King, Director of Planning, Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government)



Left: Land Capability Map, Lexington-Fayette County.

- Focused on preserving the needed infrastructure for agriculture - a critical mass of farmland.

Also essential to the plan's success was that it used both regulatory and incentive approaches to avoid what all agreed should not happen - hammering the farmer through regulations. This led to:

- An increase in the minimum lot size in the 113,900 acres of core agricultural and rural lands (89% of the undeveloped land in the rural area) from 10 to 40 acres.
- A linked voluntary purchase of development rights program to obtain conservation easements on 40,000-50,000 acres of farmland over a 20 to 30 year period.



Left: Aerial and Urban - Rural Service Boundary Lines of Lexington-Fayette County, KY.

The Results:

- Over 10,000 acres of farmland have been protected after just two short years of the program, 20% of the ultimate 30-year goal.
- The clear distinction between urban and rural will be maintained.
- Because of a consensus-based planning process and attention to balancing all interests, four years after its adoption, Fayette County's farmland preservation program continues to benefit from broad public support, including farming, economic development, and environmental interests.

Collier County, Florida: The Homegrown Florida Plan

The Challenge:

In 1999, Collier County found itself in a contentious situation, with divisions between the farming, development, and environmental communities, and a legal challenge to the Comprehensive Plan. The result was a Mandate of Final Order from the Florida Department of Community Affairs to develop a plan that would:

- Protect prime agricultural areas in the county's northeast farming belt, wetlands, and upland habitat.
- Utilize creative land use planning to accommodate future growth and diversify the economic base.

The Solution:

In 2000, property owners and Collier County agreed to collaborate on a plan for a 200,000-acre area in the northeast breadbasket sector of the county. Important features of the five-step planning process:

- A comprehensive rural land analysis and testing of alternative planning scenarios to help stakeholders understand the impacts of policy alternative.
- Involvement of property owners and a multi-interest Citizen Advisory Committee in collaborative decision-making to prioritize tools, techniques, and strategies.

Adopted in 2002, the goal of the plan is to preserve 90,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land and maintain an additional 75,000 acres of agricultural lands (80% of all agricultural resources) in 25 years through market-based incentives that do not require public funds. The core feature of the plan is the transfer of specific land-based rights through stewardship credits from sending areas that were designated for protection of natural and agricultural resources to receiving areas where development is to be permitted.

Collier County's Rural Land Stewardship Plan is at the front-end of the discussion we are having at this conference and of the next phase of growth management issues for Florida's rapidly growing coastal counties. Urban growth boundaries have built out at lower densities, and development is now pushing inland into rural lands. Unfortunately, rural land planning has not been part of the planning process in Florida until now. (Al Reynolds, Wilson Miller, Naples, Florida)

Alternative Scenario Design



- Citizen Advisory Committee prioritizes tools, techniques and strategies and creates scenarios that:
 - ✓ Discourage urban sprawl
 - ✓ Direct incompatible land uses away from critical habitat
 - ✓ Utilize innovative planning techniques
 - ✓ Achieve a dynamic and sustainable balance of uses
 - ✓ Create an incentive based system, not more regulation
 - ✓ Not rely on publicly funded acquisition

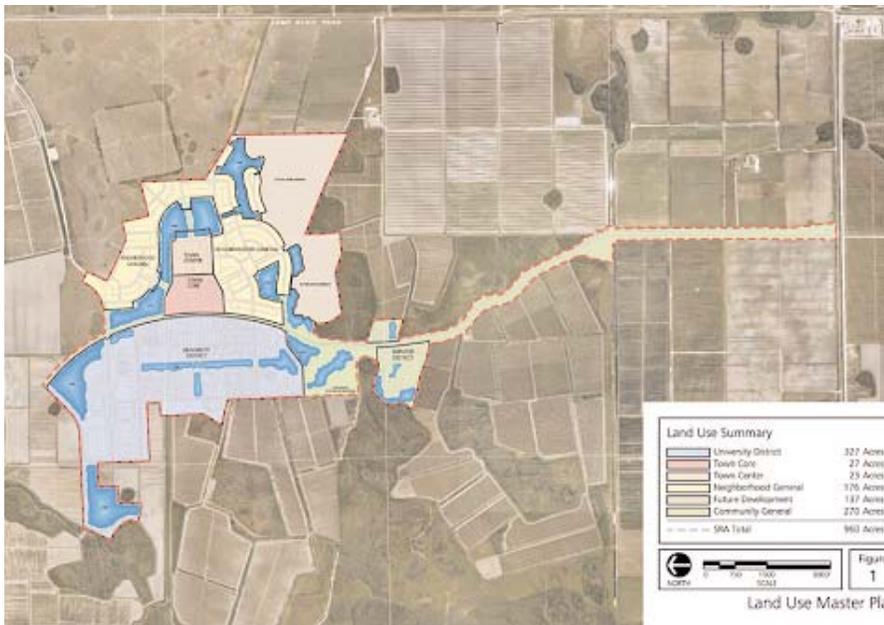
Left: Comprehensive Rural Land Analysis, Collier County, FL.

In This Plan:

- Stewardship credits are based on the natural resource value of the land, with the amount of credits driven by the land characteristics that the public most valued.
- Compact new towns and villages based on traditional town planning principles serve as the receiving area for the stewardship credits from the protected natural resource areas.

The Results:

- The first new town in 2002, Ave Maria, when completed will contain 4,000 acres and will protect 17,000 acres of agricultural and environmentally important land.
- The overall development footprint is one-tenth of the prior Comprehensive Plan by accommodating the 2025 population in a compact development form.
- The plan enjoys broad public support: "Everyone got something out of the plan and the community got a solution it could not have otherwise gotten."



Left: The new town of Ave Maria.

THE MESSAGE FOR FUTURE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE COUNTRYSIDE:

Whether a Treasure Coast farmer, developer, environmentalist, or citizen activist, conference participants sent a clear message. They share much in common when it comes to the region's countryside. They agree that it is important to the quality of life of every citizen and is in jeopardy based on current trends. "To preserve the countryside, the system needs fixing."

The future of the region's countryside is at risk.

- The stewards of the countryside - the region's farmers - are faced with crippling economic forces beyond their control, making the last crop (development) all too often the only economic choice. Farmers own a significant amount of the land in the Treasure Coast. How farmers dispose of that land will have significant impacts on communities and natural resources. The switch point is where land becomes more valuable for development than for agriculture. Farmers sell, and the land switches.
- High population growth coupled with escalating housing costs and a pervasive pattern of low-density sprawl development are pushing development further and further into the countryside, creating land use conflicts with farmers and escalating competition for land.
- The proliferation of 5 and 10-acre ranchettes are suburbanizing the countryside with large lot developments that meet Florida's definition of sprawl. Ranchettes are not agriculture. They are too small to farm and too large to make financial or environmental sense for communities, and accommodate very few of the needs of a rapidly growing population.

Effective solutions require looking at the bigger picture.

- The economic realities of farming must be considered in designing public policies and plans. To maintain agriculture as a part of their future, communities need to get busy evaluating the impact of planning decisions on the business of farming and supporting local agriculture.

As we move forward with this dialogue, we need to look carefully at where we do not want to develop, just as we have looked at where we want to develop. If we don't decide where development should not occur, we will have a continuous urban landscape. No piece of land is immune from development unless someone makes the decision not to develop. This decision must be based on the future roles and values that agriculture can provide in an urbanizing setting. Unless these roles and values are described clearly and become part of the long-term settlement strategy, agriculture may cease to become a viable land use alternative. It is all about choices. (Peter Spyke)

- Planning processes should forge links between agriculture and its neighboring communities. This should be done through a conversation that clearly defines the value of agriculture in the permanent landscape - why it is important and what it means to citizens. Agriculture needs good reasons to stay other than for food production or the economic value of farms.

- An understanding of market forces is essential to ensure that public policies and plans yield the pattern and character of development that citizens desire. Development is a market economy response to the public policies and restrictions that communities put in place.

- The impact of public policy and investment decisions on agriculture and development patterns also should be examined in the context of how they hurt or help the restoration of the Everglades.

Successful programs to preserve the countryside have the following ingredients:

- Look at the long-term horizon - the consequences of how today's trends will play out over time - and plan the future of the countryside with the same level of detailed analysis and planning applied to urban areas. Farmland should not be just a big green area colored in on land use maps.

- Make sure that programs are based on sound information and analysis and are in proper balance. Begin with the farmers who own the land and base plans on community values and a planning process that has all voices at the table. It will not work if anyone is left out or feels unfairly treated.

- Protect contiguous blocks of farmland in important agricultural areas, including reducing or eliminating 5 and 10-acre residential development in rural areas and directing development into compact urban areas.

- Emphasize incentives for farmers to maintain the land. Avoid the hammer of regulation only and enhance, not remove, landowners' property rights.

**The Treasure Coast
Regional Planning Council**

Since 1989, the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council has been providing town planning and urban design assistance upon request to local governments within its region and, more recently, in other areas of the state. The TCRPC's Strategic Regional Policy Plan, adopted in 1995, uses New Urbanism and smart growth principles to provide instructions for improving settlement patterns; protecting the countryside; and building authentic towns, cities, and villages.

For further information, contact:

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