



May 16, 2008

Overall, the 2008 legislative session will probably be remembered more for the things that didn't pass than the ones that did.

The statistics say it all: out of more than 2,500 bills filed, only 313 successfully passed both chambers. Generally speaking, for every bill that will find its way to the Governor's Office, seven others died when the ceremonial hankies dropped at the end of session.

In the following pages, we have encapsulated the primary issues of special interest to Florida Farm Bureau members.

Overwidth Farm Equipment: Rep. Greg Evers, R-Baker, and Sen. Carey Baker, R-Eustis, sponsored legislation to eliminate permits and fees for moving large agricultural equipment within a 50 mile radius of the home farm. Deliveries by equipment dealers are also exempted.

The new language states: *"The width and height limitations of this section shall not apply to farming or agricultural equipment, whether self-propelled, pulled, or hauled, when temporarily operated during daylight hours upon a public road that is not a limited access facility as defined in s. 334.03 (13), and the width and height limitations may be exceeded by such equipment without a permit.*

To be eligible for this exemption, the equipment shall be operated within a radius of the real property owned, rented or leased by the equipment owner. However, equipment being delivered by a dealer to a purchaser shall not be subject to the 50-mile limitation.

Farming or agricultural equipment greater than 174 inches in width must have one warning lamp mounted on each side of the equipment to

denote the width and must have a slow-moving vehicle sign. Warning lamps required by this paragraph must be visible from a distance of at least 1000 feet.

The operator of equipment operated under this subsection is responsible for verifying that the route used has adequate clearance for the equipment."

Greenbelt: Farm Bureau members across the state have been faced with the problem of county property appraisers denying Greenbelt assessments by arbitrarily setting a minimum acreage for certain types of agricultural operations.

That problem has now been solved, thanks to Rep. Frank Attkisson, R-Kissimmee. Rep. Attkisson successfully added a provision to HB 909, the Department of Revenue's legislative package, that states that *in no event shall a minimum acreage be required for agricultural assessment.*

Florida Forever: Legislation by Rep. Will Kendrick, R-Carrabelle, and Sen. Burt Saunders, R-Naples, extends the Florida Forever Program for another 10 years, through the year 2020. It increases the funding from \$3 billion to \$5.3 billion with a \$300 million annual cap.

The new program increases emphasis on land management, restoration and management of imperiled species, public access, working water fronts and protection of agricultural and rural lands. The Rural and Family Lands Program will receive \$10.5 million.

Also, payment in lieu of taxes for small counties is expanded from 10 years to the point at which the county population exceeds the population threshold.

Energy: The energy bill, HB 7135, included a broad range of provisions. Several areas are of particular note to the agricultural community:

The creation of a **Renewable Fuel Standard** mandates that by December 31, 2010, all gasoline sold in Florida must contain at least 10 percent ethanol.

Conjunctive billing will now be permitted on farms that produce alternative energy in cases where it would not cause significant rate increases for other users.

Any **vehicle emissions standards** proposed by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) must be ratified by the Legislature before being enacted.

The Public Service Commission is directed to create a state **carbon cap and trade system** It, too, requires legislative ratification.

Copper and Metal Theft: Rep. Baxter Troutman, R-Winter Haven, and Sen. Lee Constantine, R- Altamonte Springs, passed legislation to curb the growing trend of copper and metal theft.

HB 105 will deter the resale of stolen copper and other metals at recycling centers by increasing criminal penalties and requiring additional information about both the identity of the seller and proof of ownership before sales can be made.

IFAS Budget: While budget times were tough all over, the University of Florida's Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) started the session facing especially serious threats.

Ever the agricultural champions, Rep. Joe Pickens, R-Palatka, and Sen. J.D. Alexander, R-Winter Haven, teamed together to place protective proviso language in the IFAS budget: "*Funds ... are provided for the research and extension services of IFAS and shall not be transferred or used for any other purpose.*"

Sen. Evelyn Lynn, R-Ormond Beach, who chairs the Senate's Higher Education Appropriations Committee, met with Farm Bureau President John Hoblick and staff several times on IFAS budget issues. She was instrumental in making sure the University's cuts would be proportional.

Farm Bureau appreciates all our members who were active in this fight to save IFAS.

DACS Budget: Changes to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer services' budget impose higher fees for private industry. For example, pesticide registration will increase from \$250 to \$350; aquaculture registration will jump from \$50 to \$100.

Legislation that Failed: Bills dealing with a sales tax exemption on electricity used in off-farm packing houses, increased penalties for surveyors and mappers who knowingly harm landowners' fences and private property rights passed the House overwhelmingly but died without being heard on the Senate floor.

The ag industry bill, which contained several important issues, passed the House without a single negative vote. Despite much compromise, great drama and three separate incarnations, it died in Senate messages on the last day.

However, some bad issues died as well. Rep. Debbie Boyd, D-High Springs, was instrumental in stopping springs legislation that would have been harmful to agriculture. The repeal of sales tax exemptions for fish farmers, which obviously would have been detrimental to the aquaculture industry, was also successfully killed on the Senate floor.

Term Limits: Some of the most difficult times in working with the Legislature are when people who have been friends not only to your industry, but also to you, leave because of term limits.

To our friends, our champions and our supporters, we do not say goodbye. Instead, we say thank you. Thank you for your years of service, your relentless defense of our industry, your hard work and determination. Thank you also for your open doors, your integrity and your leadership.

Most importantly, thank you for your friendship. You will be missed.

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