

# **BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION PARTNERSHIP PLAN: KEEPING FLORIDA & AMERICA GROWING**

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Commissioner Nicole "Nikki" Fried  
January 2021



## A Message From Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Nikki Fried:



President Biden and Vice President Harris,

The past four years have been exceptionally challenging for the American people. From an unprecedented pandemic, to our country's reckoning with injustice, to worsening chronic hunger and economic insecurity, our country has faced numerous extraordinary tests of national faith.

From these dark days in American history, our citizens in their enduring resilience have chosen a brighter path forward in selecting a new President and Vice President. On behalf of the State of Florida and 21 million Floridians, I offer heartfelt congratulations on your election, a momentous victory that presents an opportunity to not only rebuild our cherished institutions, but to build back better for families, farmers, consumers, and all Americans.

Despite the chaos and hardships, there are many issues on which we as a nation should be able to find consensus, including the importance of a healthy, safe domestic food supply; addressing our growing climate crisis; expanding clean energy and protecting our waters; modernizing our outdated cannabis laws; defending consumers from fraud; fighting chronic hunger and feeding families in need; and committing ourselves to diversity, inclusion, and equity in our government and society.

Since taking office in January 2019, we at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) have endeavored to make progress on these important issues. As a \$1.7 billion state agency with over 4,000 employees, our department oversees Florida's \$137 billion agriculture industry and \$4 billion in agricultural exports, helps serve 319 million school meals to children, manages more than one million acres of state forests and wildlife habitats, regulates more than 500,000 products and businesses, and handles 400,000 consumer complaints and inquiries each year, among other duties.

Through this document, I am pleased to share with you and your Administration some highlights of our approaches to the pressing challenges facing our state, requests of your agencies and departments for resources to further this work, and opportunities for collaboration in service to the citizens of Florida and our nation.

Under your Administration, the next four years represent a pivotal moment to strengthen American families, rebuild America's public health and shared prosperity, reestablish American leadership in global trade that benefits American workers, farmers, and ranchers, and restore Americans' trust in public leadership. My Office of Federal Affairs is available to discuss any of the proposals herein, and my department and I look forward to partnering with you on these ambitious, necessary goals in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "nicole fried". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Nicole "Nikki" Fried, Commissioner

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# AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

## Florida Agriculture at a Glance

Agriculture is Florida's second largest economic driver, and top industry in times of economic downturn such as the present. Florida's 47,500 farms contribute \$137 billion to our economy, export more than \$4 billion in goods to 164 nations around the globe, and support 1,616,235 full and part-time direct jobs, plus 655,877 indirect jobs in other sectors, accounting for 19.8 percent of all Florida jobs. Our more than 300 commodities have earned our state the moniker of the "Seasonal Crop State." Florida is the national leader in production value of many household staples including citrus, tomatoes, cucumbers, and green beans, and a leading American producer of bell peppers, strawberries, sweet corn, squash, cabbage, peanuts, and honey, as well as greenhouse and nursery crops. South Florida alone supplies more than 150 million people in the eastern U.S. with fresh vegetables from October through May. The state's agricultural producers face challenges ranging from unfair foreign trade practices to natural disasters and climate change.

# Trade

Since taking office, Commissioner Fried has strongly advocated for a level playing field that allows American farmers to compete in the global marketplace. She was a leading voice in opposition to the USMCA's failure to address the dire trade imbalances facing Florida's seasonal crop growers, working closely with industry partners and Florida congressional members to demand timely and effective remedies. Within her first months in office, Commissioner Fried [sent a letter to the U.S. Trade Representative \(USTR\)](#) raising Florida's serious concerns with the USMCA's lack of seasonal protections, spoke with the USTR's Chief Agricultural Negotiator, and met with officials from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Commerce to raise these concerns.

Most recently, Commissioner Fried testified at virtual hearings of the [U.S. International Trade Commission \(ITC\)](#) on January 12, 2021 and the [U.S. Trade Representative](#) on August 13, 2020 regarding unfair foreign trade policies impacting domestic producers of seasonal produce. As the USMCA came into force, [she released a report](#) highlighting up to \$3.7 billion in Florida farm losses from unfair trade. Following the USTR's September 1, 2020 announcement of its intent to address these practices, Commissioner Fried [reiterated her commitment](#) to holding the Trump Administration accountable for enforceable protections and access to relief for Florida's farmers. Since then, the ITC launched the Section 201 investigation for blueberries, holding a formal hearing on injury at which the Commissioner testified; [Section 202 investigations for strawberries and bell peppers](#), which the [Commissioner submitted comments](#) for; and ongoing [Section 332 investigations for cucumbers and squash](#).

**We ask that your Administration support the ongoing work of the ITC and direct the relevant agencies to take further action to provide timely and effective remedies for America's seasonal producers harmed by unfair foreign trade practices.**

## Improved Crop Insurance

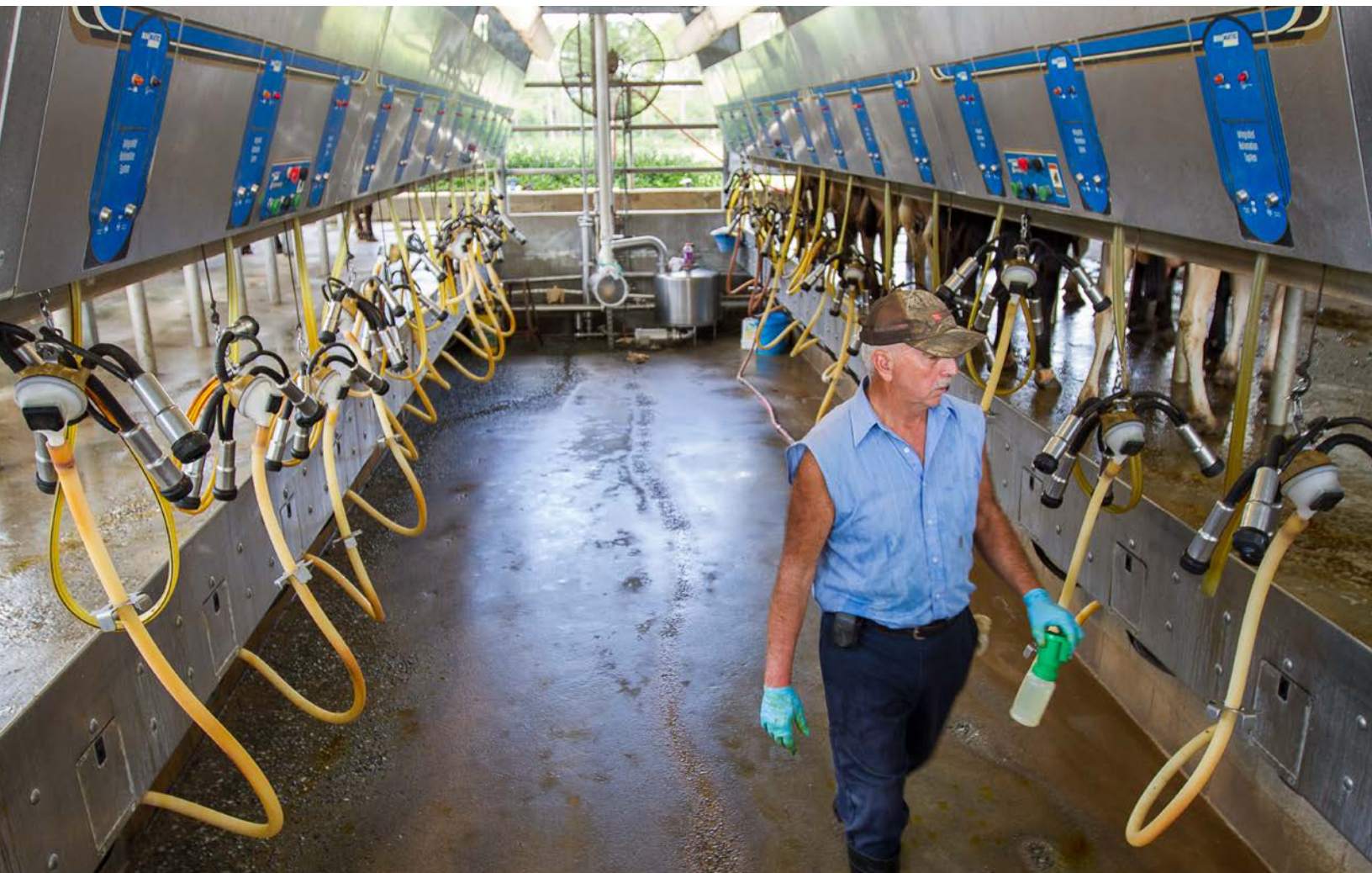
Upon taking office, Commissioner Fried was immediately met with managing our department's response to the remaining devastation of Hurricane Irma, which impacted all 67 counties, and a catastrophic Category 5 Hurricane Michael, which devastated many of our Panhandle's commodities including timber, Florida's top agricultural commodity that cannot access traditional support or relief programs given the USDA does not classify it as an eligible crop. These losses were compounded by Hurricane Sally in 2020 and its associated flooding, multiple tropical storms, and agricultural economic devastation due to COVID-19 that has wreaked havoc on our producers.

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) was created to operate and manage the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation to offer farmers insurance coverage for crop production even under difficult agricultural and economic circumstances. As producers are increasingly impacted by severe weather events due to climate change, **we ask that the USDA work to improve and expand crop insurance programs for both specialty and row crops that are cost-effective and provide adequate coverage for producers to purchase and sustain, therefore reducing the need for disaster assistance.** Furthermore, **we ask that the Administration work with Congress to amend existing farm program eligibilities to cover timber as a crop.**

# Agricultural Innovation/Technology

With the everchanging dynamics of both nature and technology, Commissioner Fried established our department's first-ever Agriculture Innovation Workgroup (AIW), which examines cutting-edge opportunities and strategies for sustainable agribusiness in Florida. This panel is composed of respected farmers, ranchers, agribusiness value chain partners, academic and technical experts, and government officials. The workgroup is tasked with making recommendations to the Commissioner of Agriculture on strategic actions and innovative solutions that support the growth and development of agriculture and ecosystem services throughout the state. The AIW is committed to the continued success of our farmers, growers, ranchers, and producers while addressing the future challenges of the industry.

USDA's Agriculture Innovation Agenda and its efforts to "align USDA's resources, programs, and research to provide farmers with the tools they need and to position American agriculture as a leader in the effort to meet the food, fiber, fuel, feed, and climate demands of the future" perfectly aligns with our AIW's mission. We believe our department can assist USDA in achieving its goal of increasing U.S. agricultural production by 40 percent while cutting its environmental footprint in half by 2050. **We ask that the USDA establish an MOU with FDACS to partner on research and implement public-private grant opportunities for agricultural innovation solutions.**





# WATER

## Florida Water at a Glance

Florida is home to 1,350 miles of coastline, the second-most in the United States. The state's waters include more than 7,500 lakes, ponds, and reservoirs, more than 12,000 miles of rivers, streams, and canals, natural aquifers that supply eight billion gallons of water daily, more than 700 freshwater springs, and the world-renowned Florida Everglades, a unique wetlands ecosystem found nowhere else on Earth, spanning 7,800 square miles. Challenges to Florida's waters include risks from offshore oil drilling, nutrient pollution from industries and residential run-off, and the need for greater water conservation with a rapidly growing population and pressures from climate change.

## Protecting Florida's Waters

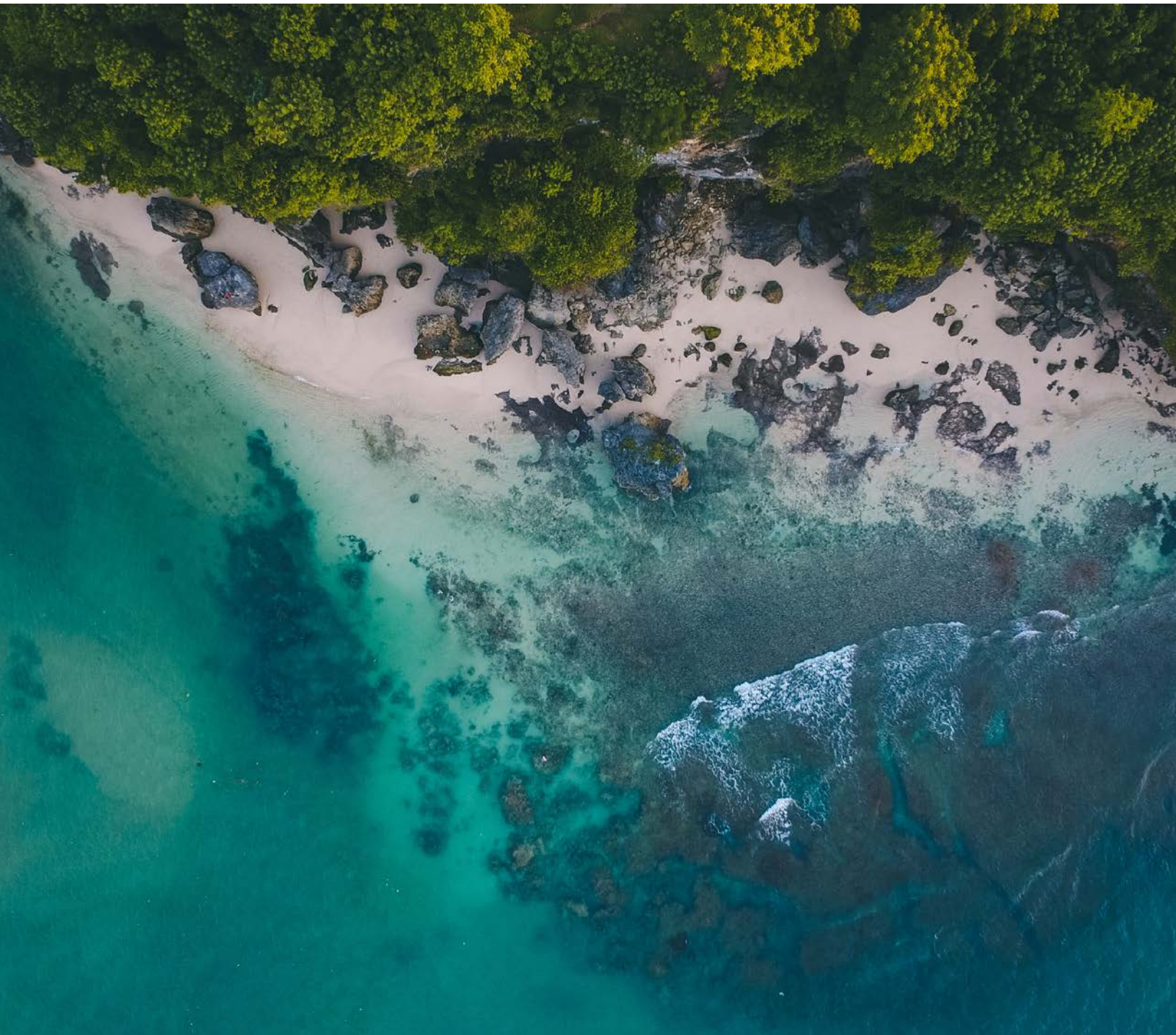
Commissioner Fried identified protecting Florida's invaluable waters as a key priority for the department as she entered office. The department's Office of Agricultural Water Policy (OAWP) was tasked with updating its existing programs to better achieve environmental benefits while maintaining high levels of agricultural production. From updating Best Management Practices manuals to emphasize water conservation, to prioritizing cost share funding to target high-value projects and sensitive geographic areas, to providing greater public transparency in our water data, we have seen significant progress in achieving conservation goals as they have been implemented. With ongoing bacteriological threats to Florida's waters, our OAWP has been a cooperative agency participant in Florida's Blue Green Algae Task Force and is actively working on efforts to reduce harmful algal bloom (HAB) development throughout the state.

As your Administration implements its environmental priorities, there are several areas of emphasis where the water and environmental programs implemented by the OAWP can be utilized to support and collaborate with programs implemented by the USDA, as well as policies that preserve the environmental resources of our state.



# Offshore Drilling Off Florida Coasts

Florida is one of the nation's most naturally pristine states, in which tourism is a significant economic driver. Along Florida's Gulf Coast alone, fishing, tourism, and recreation contribute \$17.5 billion annually to the state's gross domestic product. In 2018, 69 percent of Florida voters approved a [state amendment](#) to ban offshore drilling in the state's waters. **We applaud the President's swift actions to pause new offshore drilling and review existing permits. Furthering this commitment, we ask that your Administration work with Congress to permanently ban drilling off Florida's coasts.**



# Best Management Practices

Under Florida law, agricultural producers are required to properly implement applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs) based on the intensity of production and water resources existing on the land. The applicable BMPs are adopted by rule and outlined within nine BMP manuals utilized in implementing the BMP program. BMPs address efficiency in nutrient, irrigation, and water resource management, are mandatory for enrolled producers, and are largely concurrent with many of the conservation practices identified within existing USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs.

We welcome the focus of the President's recent Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad on advancing conservation and doing so in partnership with farmers, ranchers, and foresters - our stewards of the land. As your Administration works to identify climate-smart land management practices and prioritize them within federal Farm Bill conservation programs, our OAWP programs have the potential to support and enhance existing NRCS efforts. This includes the identification of applicable BMPs that not only meet the water and environmental conservation requirements of state law, but also are vital practices in achieving climate mitigation and adaptation, such as the utilization of cover crops, multi-crop rotations, and precision agriculture technologies like advanced irrigation management and the use of no till practices. Additionally, the OAWP has a long history of partnering with USDA staff in developing conservation plans that can be integrated with BMP enrollment, providing holistic approaches to conservation management on agricultural lands.



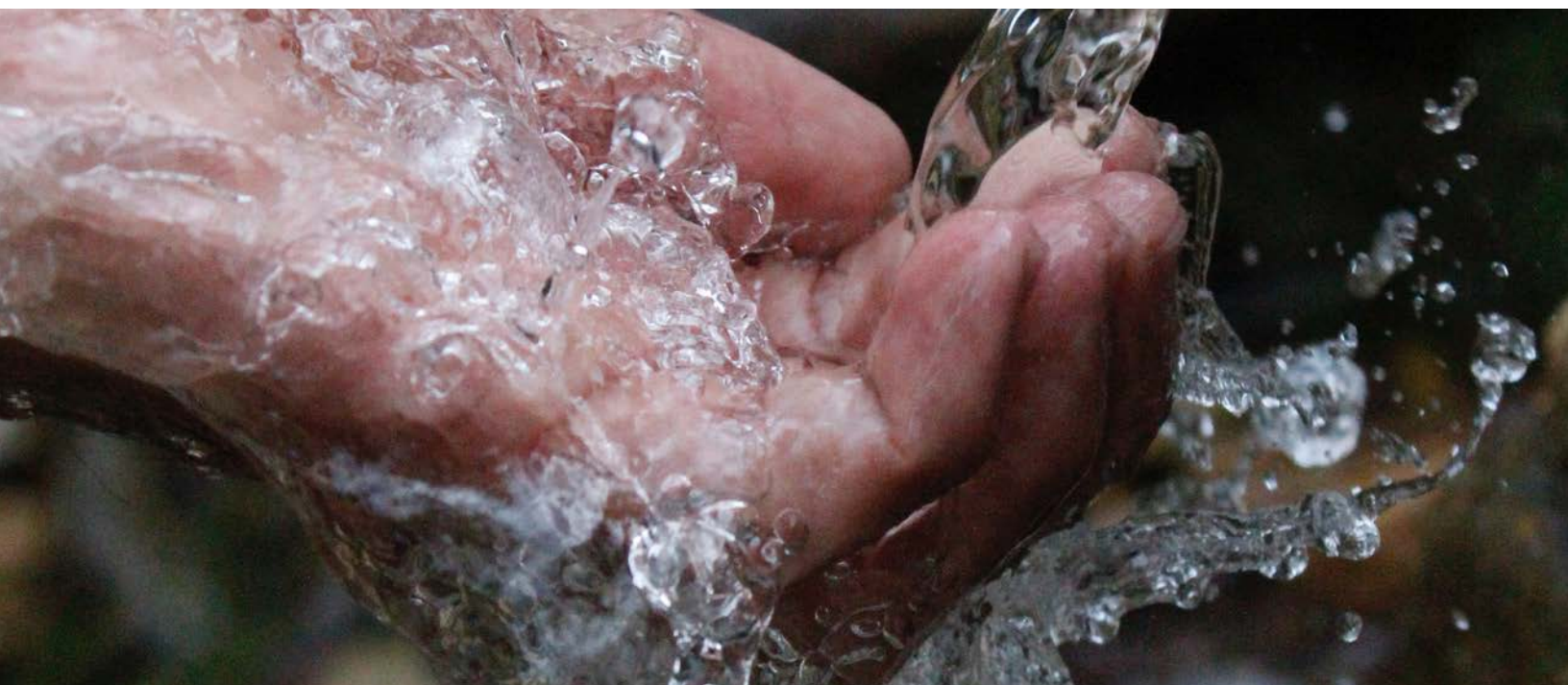
# Cost Share

Under state law, OAWP provides financial assistance to producers to help implement applicable BMPs and advanced cost share practices that lead to additional environmental resource improvements. Our OAWP cost share program is largely consistent with NRCS cost share and utilizes many of the same conservation practices. We have been aggressive in utilizing cost share to implement many of the regenerative agriculture and soil health solutions identified by the Climate 21 Project and your Administration as vital in meeting agricultural climate challenges.

Our OAWP has utilized cost share to fund rotational grazing, the utilization of cover crops as part of a crop rotation, advanced crop rotation techniques to fix and scavenge nutrients, BMPs to utilize legacy nutrients, holistic approaches to soil management to reduce the need for nutrient application, the utilization of slow release and other advanced fertilizer formulations, and the utilization of natural landscapes and water resource management projects to benefits the ecohydrology of production landscapes. Additionally, OAWP has encouraged and funded the utilization of precision agriculture equipment and practices to achieve greater efficiencies in nutrient and irrigation management, as well as promoted resilience and carbon sequestration.

These practices include the utilization of GPS and no till drill equipment, the retrofitting of irrigation infrastructure to reduce unnecessary irrigation and the resulting erosion and nutrient migration, seeder technologies that allow for nutrient placement at the root zone, and structural projects that allow for the effective management of high intensity areas for livestock, as well as manure/compost management in a manner that benefits soil health.

As your Administration prioritizes climate-smart agricultural practices as directed by the Executive Order aimed at “Empowering Workers By Advancing Conservation, Agriculture, and Reforestation,” our OAWP programs are ideally placed for collaboration. **We ask that the USDA and other relevant agencies establish partnerships in implementing projects and practices that will benefit state and federal programs, and allow producers to access funding opportunities that will enhance their agricultural production, water conservation, and land stewardship goals.**





## Research and Utilization of Innovative Technologies

Our department is aggressive in funding BMP research to guide nutrient, soil, irrigation and water resource management in agricultural production. In 2020, research priorities for our OAWP included demonstration projects on controlled release fertilizer (CRF), identifying opportunities to improve fertilizer/agronomic rates, evaluation of legacy nutrients' impact on water quality, organic crop production, and on-farm water treatment technologies, including nutrient reduction technologies and practices. **We ask that relevant agencies within your Administration seek opportunities to marry our OAWP research planning framework with broader efforts being implemented through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Economic Research Service (ERS).**



# CANNABIS POLICY MODERNIZATION

## Florida Hemp at a Glance

Following the federal legalization of hemp in the 2018 Farm Bill, Commissioner Fried spearheaded the passage of Florida's statewide hemp program, which passed the Florida Legislature nearly unanimously and was signed into law in June 2019. FDACS began issuing hemp food safety permits in January 2020 and hemp cultivation permits in April 2020. Hemp is projected to reach 35,000 licensed acres, support over 9,300 jobs, and create \$378.6 million in projected economic impact in the crop's first full year in Florida.

Florida's deep agricultural base, climate and resources, and farming infrastructure make our state an ideal place for hemp production. With 25,000 known uses, hemp could become a crop of the future for Florida agriculture. And with CBD products currently outselling THC products, hemp could significantly elevate Floridians' quality of life and strengthen and diversify our state economy for generations to come. However, several federal actions are necessary to provide Florida growers the assurances and support required for this industry to thrive.

## USDA Hemp Crop Insurance

Florida producers do not currently have access to the Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) pilot hemp insurance program. Crop insurance is vital in a state such as Florida that is subjected to extreme weather events. **We ask that the USDA expand the pilot program to Florida and work with industry partners to improve the products offered to provide needed security for growers.**

# FDA and CBD

While there is robust and growing demand for hemp-derived CBD products, the lack of national regulations and standards are holding back the industry. **We ask that the FDA establish regulatory certainty that will allow the industry to thrive, create market clarity, and provide consumers the oversight they demand to assure product safety.**

## Marijuana Legalization

While the enactment of the 2018 Farm Bill removed hemp from Schedule I of the federal Controlled Substances Act, another classification of cannabis - marijuana - remains unchanged. Addressing this discrepancy is critical not only to resolve conflicts between federal and state laws as it pertains to medical and adult use cannabis, but to also resolve the issues the hemp industry will continue to encounter over an arbitrary line defining when a product is deemed hemp and legal versus marijuana and illegal. This uncertainty is hindering access to capital, federal research funding, insurance protections and disaster relief, trade promotion through USDA and U.S. Department of Commerce programs, developing markets, and employment protections - stifling the growth of the hemp industry that is projected to increase at 32 percent annually through 2027 as our nation moves toward more environmental and health conscious products. Additionally, despite federal prohibition, the \$13.6 billion state-legal marijuana industry in the U.S. currently supports more than a quarter-million jobs, with the global legal marijuana economy expected to reach nearly \$74 billion in the next several years. Meanwhile, continued marijuana criminalization demands billions in social, economic, and criminal justice costs, while forgoing billions in potential tax revenue. With Americans' support for legal marijuana reaching an all-time high of 68 percent in November 2020, **we ask your Administration to work with Congress to federally legalize marijuana for adult use, following nearly a century of unnecessary prohibition.**





# ENERGY AND CLIMATE

## Florida's Climate Crisis and Energy at a Glance

No state in America is [as vulnerable](#) to climate change as Florida. Sea level rise is expected to cost our state \$75 billion in the next 20 years, having already risen eight inches in the past 60 years. Florida is facing more extreme weather, with 100-year hurricanes projected to happen every ten years, and a heat index over 100 degrees nearly half the year in the decades to come. Florida's agriculture producers can expect up to an 80 percent decline in key crops, and a predicted 22 percent increase in crop insurance costs. Climate change also poses extraordinary risks to public health - especially for those with asthma and heart and lung conditions, and disproportionately affecting communities of color, seniors, and low-income communities.

Meanwhile, Florida uses more residential energy than any other state except Texas, with residential energy expenses 40 percent higher than the U.S. average. 90 percent of this household energy comes from electricity, with 72 percent of that electricity generated by burning fossil fuels, including 1,400 trillion BTUs of natural gas last year. Currently, renewable energy accounts for just under seven percent of Florida's energy, with solar energy just one percent - compared to 19 percent in California and 11 percent in Massachusetts. Florida agriculture is ground zero for risks from climate change, and for opportunities to mitigate it - but this will require funding, resources, policy changes, and partnership with your Administration. **We applaud the President's Executive Actions on tackling the climate crisis, prioritizing efforts to improve energy efficiency, transition to clean energy, ensure environmental justice, and build a more sustainable economy.**

# Office of Energy

FDACS has been home to Florida's state Office of Energy since 2011, and has administered \$158 million in state and federal funds for energy efficiency and renewable energy programs since then. The Office of Energy has provided hundreds of free energy and water audits to Florida agricultural producers, as well as grants for energy efficiency upgrades for small and rural local governments, among many projects. Commissioner Fried has revitalized the office with a new focus on energy efficiency, climate change, and energy equity.

## Florida Energy and Climate Summit Plan

In 2019, Commissioner Fried convened Florida's first statewide summit to address climate change since 2008 under then-Governor Charlie Crist. The summit's 225 attendees examined the interconnectedness of energy with other sectors including agriculture, transportation, and the environment, through panel discussions on how agricultural producers are combating climate change, what local governments are doing to protect their communities against sea-level rise, and what is being done to help low income communities be more energy efficient. At the 2019 summit, Commissioner Fried released the 76-page [Florida Energy and Climate Plan](#), the state's first comprehensive energy plan in a decade.

## Florida Electric Vehicle (EV) Road Map

On January 4, 2021, the FDACS Office of Energy released the [Electric Vehicle \(EV\) Road Map](#) for the State of Florida. In development since 2019, the goals of this road map include identifying EV charging infrastructure impacts on the electric grid, areas that lack EV charging infrastructure, technical or regulatory barriers to expansion of EV charging infrastructure, and solutions to negative impacts. To gather input from stakeholders and end users, more than 500 participants joined six webinars to discuss future infrastructure considerations, and we conducted the state's first online EV owner survey on existing infrastructure, reliability, availability, and fees. The Office of Energy also released five interim EV reports on emergency evacuations, infrastructure models and deployment, and an Argonne National Laboratory analysis. **We ask that the U.S. Department of Energy and related agencies work with our Office of Energy to provide the necessary research and support to effectively expand our state's EV Road Map as it pertains to the above listed goals.**







## Energy Efficiency Equity

Low-income families often face disproportionate energy costs, and people of color experience energy burdens three times higher than other consumers, which severely impacts the financial well-being of Florida's residents. Energy is often one of the highest monthly expenses for low-income residents, as they typically pay more to power older, less efficient HVAC, water heaters, and kitchen appliances, increasing their energy burdens. To address this, in July 2020 Commissioner Fried launched a \$1 million [Florida Counties Low-Income Residential Energy Efficient Grant Program](#) developed by our Office of Energy to enhance energy efficiency and reduce the burden of high energy costs for low-income families. **Furthering the objectives outlined in the President's Executive Order promoting energy efficiency and environmental justice, we ask that your Administration allocate block grant funding for states and local governments, including FDACS, to administer additional energy efficiency equity grants.**

## Carbon Farming and Sequestration

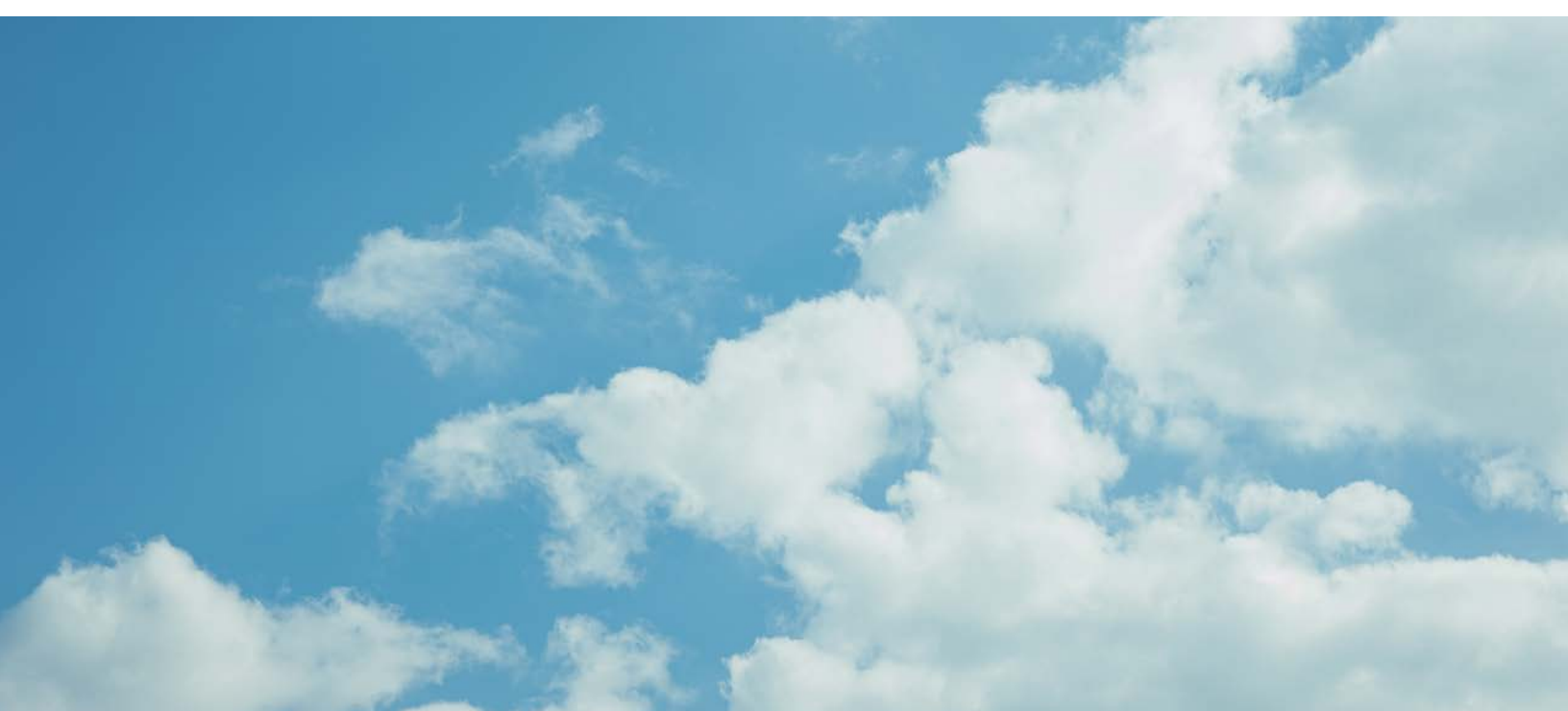
As your Administration looks to agriculture as a tool to combat climate change, as noted in the President's Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis by Empowering Workers by Advancing Conservation, Agriculture, and Reforestation, carbon sequestration is a viable technique through which both federal and state government agencies can lead by example. While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has estimated that the agriculture sector accounts for 10 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, regenerative agriculture can help sequester carbon from the atmosphere at levels that will have a real impact on the climate crisis. With 9.7 million acres of farmland, Florida is an ideal state for potential pilot programs related to your Administration's initiatives to direct federal conservation payments to farmers who use their fields to capture more carbon. **We ask that your Administration create a public-private partnership program to identify federal and state-owned lands on which potential properties not actively being managed can implement a tree planting and cover crop program for carbon sequestration.**

# Farm Renewable and Efficiency Demonstration (FRED) Program

This \$3 million program, established by our Office of Energy, provided 101 free energy and water evaluations valued up to \$4,500 to Florida agricultural producers, and provided those producers grant reimbursement for 80 percent of the cost to implement \$1.6 million in recommendations from the free energy evaluation up to \$25,000. Eligible projects have included energy-efficient lighting and water pumps and renewable energy generation, such as solar or biomass. This successful program has helped agricultural producers become more energy and water efficient while adding renewable energy to their lands, where possible. **We ask that your Administration establish a similar program nationwide to help farmers and ranchers conserve energy and water while increasing renewable energy sources, which aligns with the goal of “Empowering Workers By Advancing Conservation, Agriculture, and Reforestation” outlined in the President’s recent Executive Order.**

## Paris Climate Agreement

States and agencies like ours are working to inventory greenhouse gases, improve energy efficiency, and increase the use of renewable energy. Despite localized efforts to fight climate change, our climate is globally interconnected. With greenhouse gas emissions [rising 400 percent](#) since 1950, climate change requires a multinational response across the world to address the growing threat. Five years ago, the Paris Climate Agreement bound together 197 countries in an effort to reduce emissions and slow rising temperatures that will trigger environmental and economic crises. **We thank the President for signing on day one an order to have the United States rejoin the Paris Climate Accord and for working to establish updated 2030 climate targets.**





# FOOD, NUTRITION, AND WELLNESS

## Florida Food Insecurity at a Glance

Nearly three million Floridians, including more than 850,000 children, suffer from chronic hunger. According to Feeding America, Floridians facing food insecurity are short \$1.54 billion per year in meeting their food needs. Almost 40 percent of Florida households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits have children, and 71 percent of Florida students - 2,089,852 children - are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, of which 245,782,422 meals were served in the 2018-2019 school year. The COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to have driven food insecurity as high as one in five Floridians in 2020.

Since taking office, increasing access to food for all Floridians has been one of Commissioner Fried's highest priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the underlying issues of food insecurity, access, sustainability, and dependency on foreign commodities. This exposure also highlighted the many programmatic issues of the food supply chain and distribution to our most vulnerable populations. Fortunately, this pandemic has raised awareness of these issues, creating an opportunity to find innovative solutions to both support our farmers and improve direct food access to our families.

Our FDACS Division of Food, Nutrition and Wellness (FNW) administers child nutrition and commodity food distribution programs using state and federal funds, and provides outreach, guidance, and training to child nutrition program sponsors, schools, school food service directors, parent and teacher organizations, and students about fresh food produced in Florida. FNW's mission is to ensure that every child in Florida has access to a healthy, nutritious meal each day, increase awareness and consumption of Florida's agricultural commodities, reduce food insecurity among Florida's most vulnerable populations, and encourage healthy lifestyles among Florida residents.

# The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) Farm to Food Bank Program

This program, with support from local partners and \$363,251 in FY 2021 federal funding, allowed for the collection of a wide assortment of farm-fresh Florida produce, which was donated to nonprofit food banks throughout the state for Floridians in need. Through FDACS' food recovery and gleaning efforts, 454,753 pounds of wholesome produce has been collected and distributed at no cost to Florida residents. Continued funding to support these efforts is critical to overcoming food insecurity while reducing food waste. **We ask that your Administration work with Congress to make permanent The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) Farm to Food Bank Program authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill through FY 2023.**

## Agricultural Surplus Purchase Program

Despite Florida's agricultural abundance, ranking first or second the U.S. in production value of nearly a dozen commodities and 18th among states in number of farms, in 2019 Florida agricultural producers only accounted for 1.41 percent, or seven out of 495, of qualified bidders approved by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to sell food to the USDA. Commodity purchasing support from state departments of agriculture like FDACS can assist AMS with ensuring domestic agriculture is supported and local products are more readily available to nutrition assistance programs, like the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program and TEFAP. **We ask that USDA establish an Agricultural Surplus Purchase Program, similar to USDA's AMS Commodity Procurement Program, within state departments of agriculture to purchase surplus agricultural commodities from local farms for distribution in designated communities of need.**

## Buy American and Farm to School

In 2019, Florida's Farm to School Program reported a \$144 million economic impact, including \$30,429,315 in labor income, \$7,277,128 in federal taxes, \$3,168,504 in local and state taxes, and 639 jobs. With a firmer commitment to domestic purchasing in the federal child nutrition programs, these types of local purchasing results could be realized across America. We applaud the President's Executive Order on Ensuring the Future Is Made in All of America by All of America's Workers, which we hope to see include American farmers and ranchers producing the agricultural commodities needed to keep our domestic food supply strong. **Furthering your Administration's commitment to maximize federal procurements of domestically sourced products, we ask that the USDA adequately enforce compliance with the requirements of the Buy American provision of the National School Lunch Act to provide better support to domestic farmers, producers, and manufacturers. We also ask that your Administration consider the Florida Farm to School Program as a national model to encourage more school districts nationally to increase their commitment to local purchasing.**



## Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

FDACS has worked diligently with contracted vendors for this program that serve our region to facilitate relationship development with Florida farmers and to increase the availability of local produce in the program catalogs for schools to procure. However, stronger contractual support is needed to require - and no longer simply encourage - the sourcing of fresh fruits and vegetables from local sources. **We ask that the USDA promulgate rules to require produce vendors contracting for the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to source a percentage of domestic fresh fruit and vegetables for schools from local sources.**

## Universal School Meals Program

In the 2018 school year, more than 283 million lunches were served in Florida through the National School Lunch Program, with 87.9 percent of those lunches provided free or at a reduced price. Florida was one of eleven states to pilot the phase-in of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), authorized by Congress as a part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. While more than 1,400 schools have participated in CEP since its inception in Florida, millions of students at thousands of other schools deserve the opportunity to receive nutrition meals daily at no cost. Establishment of a universal school meals program would also reduce the administrative burdens on school food authorities that must currently process millions of school meal eligibility applications for students to receive meals accurately. **We ask that your Administration transition the federal school nutrition programs to a universal school meals program to provide children with access to meals at no charge and reduce the stigma associated with the utilization of free and reduced-price meals.**

## Federal Healthy Food Prescription Pilot Program

FDACS has worked collaboratively with organizations including the Florida Medical Association to establish food prescription programs locally across the state. However, to be successful, these programs need increased awareness and financial support. **We ask that your Administration establish a Federal Healthy Food Prescription Pilot Program to allow healthcare providers, through public-private partnerships, to prescribe fruits and vegetables to underserved communities to prevent diet-related diseases.**

# Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Online Purchasing Pilot

The SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot, administered by the Florida Department of Children and Families, has been a success not only in Florida but throughout the country during COVID-19. This program assisted our targeted communities of seniors, rural areas, and those without vehicle access to fully utilize their SNAP benefits and reduce food insecurity in Florida. **We ask that your Administration make the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot a permanent USDA program and expand it to other retailers, including farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and food hubs, as the pilot was demonstrated to be a feasible and rapid response to food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

## Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children Demonstrations

Because applications for participation in the pilot demonstrations are limited, FDACS has not had the opportunity to participate in the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) project. However, FDACS worked collaboratively with Florida's SNAP agency to provide Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), and currently also works with the Florida agency overseeing the state's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program for the successful implementation of the Farmers Market Nutrition Program in sixteen counties throughout the state. In 2020, P-EBT has proven to reduce food hardship experienced by the lowest-income households during the COVID-19 crisis, and full implementation of SEBTC would have the same effect for children in low-income households during summer vacation. **We ask that your Administration make permanent the SEBTC demonstrations that were created to study the use of SNAP and WIC EBT technology in providing food assistance to low-income children during the summer by providing their families with more resources to use at food stores.**





# DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Commissioner Fried has recognized from day one the need for a cultural transformation in the agriculture industry and has worked tirelessly to ensure that agriculture in this state, both internally and externally, is diverse and accessible to all. Internally, she hired the department's first Director of Diversity and Inclusion, created a Diversity and Inclusion Work Group to provide intentional diversity and inclusion within FDACS, and established the state's first LGBTQ Consumer Advocate position. The Work Group is making continuous recommendations on how our agency [can increase its inclusionary steps](#), such as adding the term "inclusion" to the department's core values, requiring de-escalation tactics and reporting of excessive force within our Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement, and adding sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes at FDACS. Commissioner Fried and the Work Group seek to increase opportunities for nontraditional groups within agriculture, engaging with marginalized community groups, minority student ag-based associations, and agriculture-based land-grant Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

# Farmers of Color

Through townhalls and specialized commodities workshops, and by working with diverse community groups and stakeholders such as the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, Urban League, Black Professionals Network, NAACP, and the Divine Nine Fraternities and Sororities, FDACS has created a cross-learning platform to discuss agency initiatives and build relationships to establish long-term trust and tangible partnerships. **We ask that your Administration take several initiatives to promote racial equity in agriculture, including the establishment of an HBCU Land-Grant Institution state/federal grant matching program, creation of a joint USDA and state departments of agriculture Equity Advisory Commission, continuation of the Diversity Road Map Structure established under then-USDA Secretary and current Secretary-designee Tom Vilsack, and partnership with our FDACS Office of Diversity and Inclusion to establish similar diversity and inclusion offices in all state departments of agriculture.**

**S.4929 Justice for Black Farmers Act:** In November 2020, U.S. Senators Cory Booker, Elizabeth Warren, and Kirsten Gillibrand introduced landmark legislation in the 116th Congress, the [Justice for Black Farmers Act](#), that would address and correct historic discrimination in agriculture. **We encourage your Administration to support the following proposals outlined by the bill sponsors:**

- **Create a Farm Conservation Corps:** Establish within the USDA a program where young adults from socially disadvantaged communities would be provided support and resources to pursue successful careers in the agricultural industry, and that those who participate in the program would be prioritized for land grants.
- **Empower HBCUs and Advocates for Black Farmers:** Provide necessary USDA financial resources for 1890 land-grant institutions and nonprofits to provide pro bono assistance for Black farmers, as well as for HBCUs to expand their agriculture research programs and ag-focused academic offerings.
- **Assist All Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers:** Increase USDA funding for assistance and programs that serve all socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.





# Veterans in Agriculture

Florida is home to over 1.5 million veterans, the nation's third largest veteran population. Almost a quarter of all U.S. veterans return from active military duty to reside in rural communities. Upon taking office, Commissioner Fried hired our department's first Veterans Affairs Director to identify opportunities for veterans in agriculture, partnering with state nonprofits such as Veterans Florida through their [veterans agriculture internship](#). A significant portion of this internship's funding comes from the [Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Program](#) provided through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The program encourages the development of training opportunities specifically designed for veterans and works to increase the number of veterans with agriculture skills through farm and ranch programs. **We ask that the USDA work with Congress to expand funding of the Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Program to continue to honor and support the men and women of our Armed Forces and provide pathways to economic opportunity for veterans in agriculture.**

## Operation Outdoor Freedom

Led by our Florida Forest Service, which is part of our department, Operation Outdoor Freedom (OOF) provides no-cost recreational and rehabilitative opportunities to wounded veterans on state forests, agricultural lands, and private lands throughout Florida. Since its inception in 2009, OOF has hosted more than 500 events and served approximately 4,100 wounded veterans. Participation in OOF has been established for Florida residents, as defined in state law, who are honorably discharged military veterans with either a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or greater from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs or is a Purple Heart recipient. **We ask that your Administration direct the National Park Service to partner with the Florida Forest Service to assess the feasibility of establishing an Operation Outdoor Freedom program on the federal level.**





# RURAL COMMUNITIES

## Florida Rural Communities at a Glance

1.8 million Floridians live in 30 rural Florida counties or in rural portions of Florida's 37 urban counties. The poverty rate in Florida's rural communities exceeds 20 percent, compared to 13 percent in the state's urban areas, and more than 19 percent of rural Floridians have not completed high school, compared to 12 percent of Florida's urban residents. While 154 rural health clinics, 91 federally qualified health centers, and 26 short term hospitals service Florida's rural communities, more than 170 rural hospitals have closed nationwide since 2005, with 22 percent of Florida's rural hospitals at risk of closing. More than two million Floridians are underserved in broadband service, with more than 50 percent of Floridians lacking adequate internet access in Florida's poorest rural counties.

## Rural Broadband

Access to high-speed internet is critical for rural residents to access economic, education, and telehealth opportunities, among other resources. Commissioner Fried has [written to Congress](#) seeking increased investment in rural broadband, and supported state legislation to invest in rural broadband infrastructure along new and expanding highway corridors. **We ask that your Administration prioritize investments in rural broadband through the last mile, including municipally-owned broadband, which will create jobs in our state's and nation's rural communities.**

# Rural Healthcare and Mental Health

Farmers and ranchers suffer a suicide rate 3.5 times that of the general population, exacerbated by pandemic economic losses, with a recent [American Farm Bureau poll](#) finding nearly half of rural adults reporting more mental health challenges than in the prior year. When Congress passed H.R.133, the end of year funding bill and COVID-19 relief package, it included a provision to provide \$28 million for the USDA to distribute as block grants to state departments of agriculture to support farmer stress programs. **Now law, we ask the USDA to move as quickly as possible to disburse these critical funds to all state departments of agriculture, including FDACS, allowing their use to establish, expand, or sustain stress assistance programs for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers.**

Understanding the importance of establishing, improving, and expanding mental health services for our agricultural communities, Commissioner Fried was also a [vocal supporter](#) of U.S. Senator Jon Tester's Seeding Rural Resilience Act, which recently became law as part of the FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act. While these two recent measures make progress in addressing farmer stress and mental health in our rural communities, more must be done. **We ask that your Administration expand access to rural mental health resources, particularly through telehealth in partnership with federally qualified health centers, invest in additional rural healthcare facilities, and seek opportunities to reduce mental health stigma in rural communities.**



# Expanded Curriculum for Agriculture Technology

Community and technical colleges are well-established pathways to opportunity for rural communities, through which innovative agricultural practices and technologies can be taught to America's next generation of farmers and ranchers. **We ask that your Administration invest in rural community and technical colleges, and direct applicable agencies to help establish cutting-edge curricula on agricultural technologies.**

## Access to Capital

Too many entrepreneurs in rural, disadvantaged, and low-income communities are stifled by a lack of access to capital. According to the Florida Chamber of Commerce, one in four Florida small businesses cite access to capital as a major concern, particularly women and people of color unable to secure financing through traditional finance channels. There are numerous positive, actionable items in your Plan for Rural America that would alleviate these concerns, including expanding Community Development Financial Institutions, Rural Business Investment Companies, and the Minority Business Development Agency. **We ask that your Administration work to expand access to capital specifically targeting rural communities, including through microloan programs, public-private venture capital, and other available means.**

## Incentivizing Food Desert Reduction

An estimated 23 million Americans, the majority of which are low-income, live in food deserts in which full-service supermarkets or food markets are not accessible nearby. Increasing access to fresh food in these areas is critical to improving public health outcomes. In 2020, Commissioner Fried [announced](#) a \$100,000 Walmart Foundation grant partnership to fight hunger in rural food deserts by linking local farmers with local food banks that do not receive traditional federal assistance in seven key Florida counties. **We ask that your Administration work with Congress to increase funding for block grants and grant projects that target food insecurity and related goals in designated food deserts.**





# CONSUMER SERVICES

## Florida Consumer Protection at a Glance

FDACS is Florida's state consumer protection agency responsible for regulating charities and handling consumer complaints. FDACS handles more than 400,000 consumer complaints and inquiries, oversees more than 500,000 regulated devices, entities, and products like gas pumps and grocery scales, performs over 61,000 lab analyses on products like gasoline and brake fluid, performs nearly 9,000 fair ride inspections, and returned over \$2.8 million to consumers through mediations with businesses. As a member of the Florida Cabinet, Commissioner Fried also sits on Florida's Executive Board of Clemency that oversees the restoration of voting and civil rights in Florida, a process of which she has called for [significant reforms](#) after less than three dozen Floridians have had voting rights restored in two years.

## "Forever Chemicals"

Highly toxic fluorinated chemicals such as per-/polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS, cross multiple divisions in our department including our Divisions of Agricultural Environmental Services, Aquaculture, Animal Industry, Agricultural Water Policy, and Food Safety. These chemicals never break down in the environment and have been known to cause cancer, reproductive and immune system harm, and other severe ailments. Commissioner Fried greatly appreciates the President's pledge to prioritize regulating PFAS, setting a national maximum contaminant level (MCL) to allow our scientists to inspect and regulate. **We ask that your Administration direct relevant agencies to work collaboratively to establish a national awareness campaign to communities who have been inadvertently impacted by these "forever chemicals" on potential health risks and contamination prevention.**

# Unsolicited Telemarketing Calls

Our Division of Consumer Services maintains Florida's state-specific Do Not Call list for residents who wish not to receive solicitations through their telephone. The agency is also responsible for licensing businesses and salespersons who solicit potential customers through telemarketing. Do Not Call violations, telemarketing complaints, and unsolicited communications are the top category of consumer complaints received by FDACS, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Last year, Commissioner Fried levied a [\\$345,000 fine](#) against a Florida company alleged to have committed 171 violations of state telemarketing law. **We ask that your Administration strengthen enforcement provisions for state and federal agencies to regulate these illegal acts and enforce punitive measures.**

## Automatic Voter Registration (AVR)

Currently, eighteen states and the District of Columbia have Automatic Voter Registration policies allowing residents over 18 to automatically opt-in to register to vote with the option to opt out. This policy keeps voter rolls more accurate, creates a consistent stream of updates between registration agencies and election officials, and reduces potential mistakes caused by processing paper registration forms by hand, preventing errors that cause delays on Election Day and prevent eligible voters from casting regular ballots. **We ask your Administration to consider working with Congress to enact a national Automatic Voter Registration policy to empower all eligible citizens to participate in our hallowed electoral process, the hallmark of our American democracy for 244 years.**





# **BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION PARTNERSHIP PLAN: KEEPING FLORIDA & AMERICA GROWING**

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Commissioner Nicole "Nikki" Fried  
January 2021