



Date: March 19, 2008

To: South Florida Water Issues Network &
State Water & Natural Resources Advisory Committee

From: Charles Shinn, Assistant Director
Government & Community Affairs

Re: South Florida Water Management District
March Agricultural Highlights Report

Water Shortage Workshops Provide Information Exchange

Farmers, nursery growers, and water management officials had the opportunity to learn from each other in a Water Shortage Workshop held on March 5 in West Palm Beach. The workshop was developed to give farmers the opportunity to let water management officials know about the impacts that Water Management District decisions have on their livelihood. The workshop also gave the District a forum to the agricultural community to let them know how hard it is to balance current and future water needs in an unpredictable weather climate.

Pathologists from UF/IFAS were present to answer questions pertaining to disease pressure with altered watering schedules. Also present were representatives from FDACS Office of Water Policy to discuss best management practices.

The workshop was hosted by Florida Farm Bureau Federation and UF/IFAS. Two other workshops are scheduled around south Florida. Farmers and growers are encouraged to participate in the workshop close to their location. The dates and locations for the remaining workshops are:

Immokalee

March 18, 2008 (4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.)
IFAS Southwest Florida – Research and Education Center
2686 SR 29 North
Immokalee, FL 34142-9515

Homestead

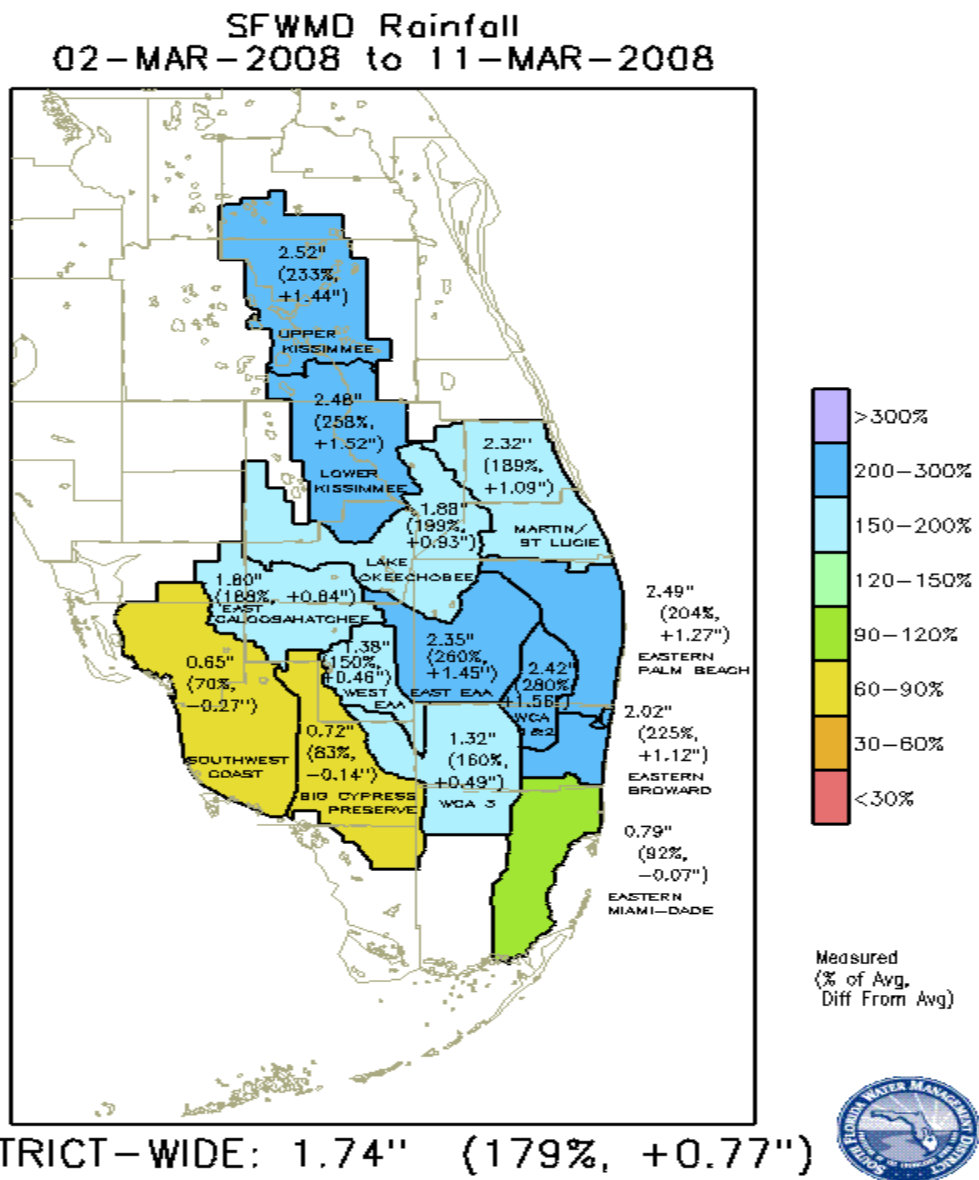
March 25, 2008 (1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.)
Miami-Dade County Extension Office
18710 SW 288th Street
Homestead, FL 33030-2309

Favorable Rainfall Helps South Florida Water Supply

The forecast calls for 'much below normal' rainfall and south Florida was preparing for the worse. Yet among the doom and gloom two rain events have been a godsend to agriculture across the region.

On February 13 and 14, much of the land south of Lake Okeechobee received several inches of rainfall. This rainfall was vital for new crops of vegetables and sugarcane. The precipitation quickly soaked in the parched soils and gave everyone a temporary reprieve.

Once again a weather system defied the odds of a typically dry La Niña forecast on March 6 – 8 by dropping an average of 1.74" of rain across south Florida as noted in the following graphic.



GRADS: COLA/IGES

2008-03-11-15:02

The March rain event was particularly significant as the basins that feed Lake Okeechobee averaged close to 2 ½ inches. Lake Okeechobee dipped below 10 feet for several days last month but the level has held steady as a result of these rain events. The current lake level as of March 13 is 10.16 feet which is still close to four feet below normal.

Although the unusual rain events have been encouraging, south Florida still has a severe water shortage due to the low level of Lake Okeechobee and drought conditions still persist throughout much of the region.

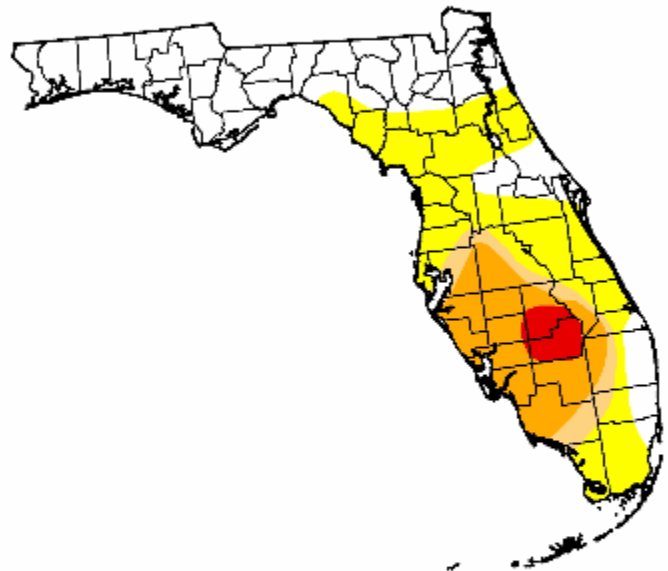
U.S. Drought Monitor

Florida

March 11, 2008
Valid 7 a.m. EST

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	42.1	57.9	24.7	19.2	3.1	0.0
Last Week (03/04/2008 map)	36.7	63.3	32.3	20.3	3.1	0.0
3 Months Ago (12/18/2007 map)	34.7	65.3	33.3	19.8	2.6	0.0
Start of Calendar Year (01/01/2008 map)	31.8	68.2	33.1	19.7	2.6	0.0
Start of Water Year (10/02/2007 map)	20.8	79.2	44.2	22.0	9.1	0.0
One Year Ago (03/13/2007 map)	9.1	90.9	50.1	2.7	0.0	0.0



Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Drought - Moderate
- D2 Drought - Severe
- D3 Drought - Extreme
- D4 Drought - Exceptional

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements

<http://drought.unl.edu/dm>



Released Thursday, March 13, 2008

Author: Brian Fuchs, National Drought Mitigation Center

Drought Economic Impacts to Agriculture Presented to County Commissioners

During the recent 10-County Coalition meeting, the Florida Department of Agriculture (FDACS) made a presentation showing the importance of agriculture to Florida’s economy and the significance of agriculture from the areas surrounding Lake Okeechobee.

According to data from FDACS and the South Florida Water Management District, loss to area growers due severe drought conditions is in the range of \$42 – 55 million every 90 days. Impacts to the south Florida economy range from \$100 – 131 million during the same time period. The 90 day period was used to represent one complete crop cycle (planting to harvest).

The area surrounding the lake is known as the Lake Okeechobee Service Area (LOSA). Agriculture in LOSA represents 32% of the agriculture within the 16 County boundary of the South Florida Water Management District. It is over 700,000 acres in size and accounts for \$1.3 billion in cash receipts annually. It also provides the state’s residents with over 34,000 jobs.

The 10-County Coalition consists of a County Commission member from each of the ten counties that are directly impacted by the management of Lake Okeechobee. Those counties are Glades, Hendry, Highlands, Lee, Martin, Okeechobee, Osceola, Palm Beach, Polk, and St. Lucie.

Florida Farm Bureau Federation Encourages Re-Airing of ‘Grow Smart’ Campaign

Florida Farm Bureau Federation recently encouraged South Florida Water Management officials to find and make available the ‘Grow Smart’ public service announcements (PSA’s). The PSA’s inform homeowners that they can have beautiful lawns and plants during a drought by selecting the proper plants and planting them in the correct location in the yard. The PSA’s also provide information to save water by using mulch and fixing broken sprinklers.

The PSA’s were developed in cooperation with the Water Management District, University of Florida/IFAS, and the Palm Beach Chapter of the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscapers Association.

Two Positions on Water Management District Governing Board Expire

Two of the nine seats on the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board expired at the end of February.

Nicolás Gutiérrez, Jr., Esq. has served on the board for eight years representing Miami/Dade County and has applied for reappointment. Harkley Thornton has also served for eight years representing the northern counties in the District (Glades, Highlands, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola and Polk). Mr. Thornton is not seeking reappointment.

Gutiérrez and Thornton will continue to serve on the board until Governor Crist makes the appointments for replacement or reappointment in the case of Gutiérrez.

Monthly Reports Available on Florida Farm Bureau Federation’s Website

This report is also available on Florida Farm Bureau Federation’s website (www.floridafarmbureau.org/issues_public_policy/drought).

If you do not wish to receive this report in the future or are receiving multiple copies, please contact me at the email address below.

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