



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES COMMISSIONER NICOLE "NIKKI" FRIED

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

October 15, 2020

Chris Spencer, Policy Director
Office of Policy and Budget
Executive Office of the Governor
The Capitol, Room 1603
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Mr. Spencer:

The Agency Capital Improvements Program for Fiscal Year 2021-22 through Fiscal Year 2025-26 for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is submitted and has been posted to the Florida Fiscal Portal, following the instructions dated July 2020. The information provided electronically is a true and accurate presentation of our proposed Fixed Capital Outlay Legislative Budget Request of \$41,895,000 for Fiscal Year 2021-22.

This proposal reflects the department's commitment to foster continued growth and ensure the long-term sustainability of Florida's agriculture industry as well as serve as a good steward of the state's natural resources, help ensure the safety and wholesomeness of food and protect consumers from fraud and deceptive business practices.

Despite the unfavorable economic environment created by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Florida's Hemp industry, set in motion by the creation of the State Hemp Program in 2019, is flowering more each day. Currently underway with the first harvests and firmly entrenched in the inspection of contaminants related to hemp and hemp extracts, the department's laboratory testing capabilities are paramount for the continued success of this new industry. The department's proposal includes \$800,000 for laboratory renovations related to sample preparation and contaminant screening for confirmatory testing of pre-harvest industrial hemp sampling and animal feed analyses.

Agricultural water policies continue to be among the most critical issues facing the state. Recognizing the importance of this issue, the department's proposal includes \$15 million for nutrient reduction and water retention projects in the Lake Okeechobee, St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee River watersheds as well as other sensitive areas across the state. These projects have the potential to result in significant reductions in nutrient loads reaching sensitive water bodies.

Maintaining Florida's agricultural land base is another critically important issue within the state. Florida's agriculture industry is a pillar of the state's economy, generating \$137 billion in annual economic impact. This industry relies on available agricultural lands to grow and remain strong. The department's proposal includes \$15 million for the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, which seeks to prevent development through the acquisition of perpetual conservation easements, thereby allowing agricultural operations to continue, protecting natural resources and providing critical wildlife habitat. To date, more than 49 partnerships with Florida families have preserved more than 58,250 acres of precious landscape from future development.

Capitalizing on the efforts of the department and legislature from last Session to secure additional innovative grant awards from the federal government by providing additional matching funding, the department's proposal includes \$1.25 million for Grants and Aids to Local Governments for United States Department of Energy grants.

The department's proposal also includes several maintenance and repair and code correction projects totaling approximately \$7.4 million across the department's various divisions and offices, \$450,000 to secure the remaining necessary appropriation to complete the RESTORE Council federal project in Tate's Hell State Forest, and \$2 million to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the operations of the Florida State Fair. The maintenance and repair projects include critical repairs related to the Central Plant Chiller at the Conner Complex in Tallahassee as well as road and bridge repairs, maintenance and small construction at our state forests. These projects are important to ensure the safety of the department's employees as well as the individuals who access the department's facilities and state forests.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues. If you have any questions, feel free to call me or my staff at (850) 410-2280.

Sincerely,



Nicole Fried
Commissioner of Agriculture