



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES COMMISSIONER WILTON SIMPSON

September 15, 2023

Mr. Chris Spencer, Director
Office of Policy and Budget
Executive Office of the Governor
1702 Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Mr. Spencer:

The Agency Capital Improvements Program for Fiscal Year 2024-25 through Fiscal Year 2028-29 for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is submitted and has been posted to the Florida Fiscal Portal, following the instructions dated June 2023. The information provided electronically is a true and accurate presentation of our proposed Fixed Capital Outlay Legislative Budget Request of \$615,384,262 for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

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.

Maintaining Florida's agricultural land base is among the most critical issues within the state. Florida's agriculture industry is a pillar of the state's economy, generating more than \$180 billion in annual economic impact. This industry relies on available agricultural lands to grow and remain strong. The department's proposal includes \$300 million for the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, which seeks to prevent development through the acquisition of perpetual agricultural conservation easements, thereby allowing agricultural operations to continue, protecting the wildlife corridor and natural resources, and providing critical wildlife habitat. To date, more than 59 partnerships with Florida families have preserved nearly 69,000 acres of precious landscape from future development.

Agricultural water policy is another critically important issue facing the state. Recognizing the importance of this issue, the department's proposal includes \$40 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.

The department's proposal also includes critical infrastructure construction, maintenance and repair, and code correction projects totaling approximately \$247 million across the department's various divisions and offices, and \$12 million to address aging infrastructure and security improvements at the Florida State Fair. These projects include the construction of a consolidated FDACS facility at the Conner Complex in Tallahassee, proposed architectural and engineering design to address space needs in the Division of Plant

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Industry as well as road and bridge repairs, maintenance and small construction at our state forests and state farmer's markets. 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. The infrastructure improvements and security upgrades to the Florida State Fair will enhance the safety of its patrons and employees, as well as improve its ability to accommodate federal, state, and local agencies during natural disasters.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues. If you have any questions, feel free to call me or my staff at (850) 617-7700.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Wilton Simpson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Wilton Simpson
Commissioner of Agriculture