

Copy of email sent out by Pete Spyke on Friday, Dec. 3, 2004:

Pete Spyke here, with a report on the Rural Lands Committee of the Indian River Citrus League (RLC).

Today, Doug Bournique and I met with the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast (CSTC), which is an advisory group established by Sen. Ken Pruitt. The purpose of CSTC is to develop a set of guidelines for ways that the Treasure Coast can evolve over the next 15 years. The almost unanimous desire that the Treasure Coast should end up in a different place than the counties to the south was the reason behind forming the group, so the charter essentially includes the assumption that change is a necessary component of the outcome.

As you will recall, we had formed the Rural Lands Committee of the Indian River Citrus League after the Rural Lands Symposium was held last December, almost a year ago today. We have been meeting through the year and discussing the best way to go about dealing with rural land issues. Sen. Pruitt formed CSTC last spring, after we had already started the RLC. We've been watching the progress of the CSTC closely, and two weeks ago Doug and I met with Sen. Pruitt to discuss the possibility of working with CSTC in some fashion, since we had some (not all) goals in common. His suggestion was that we could form a subcommittee of the CSTC to specifically look at rural lands issues.

Today, the CSTC formally adopted a motion to make this a reality. Therefore, at this point, it appears that the activities of the RLC will take two forms. First, we will pull together a group of people similar to the BMP Working Group that includes citrus, vegetable, cattle and other ag producers, regulatory agencies, County and City government representatives, environmental groups, and other interested parties along with representation from the CSTC to undertake a process that will lead to a focused section of the Interim and Final CSTC report that specifically deals with Rural Lands. This will compose the "CSTC Process", and will likely have a very brisk pace.

The CSTC is scheduled to issue an Interim Report in January of 2005, and a Final Report in September of 2005. There are four "Drafting Teams" within the CSTC that are working on different sections of the report. The four sections are Built Environment, Natural Environment, Economic Diversity, and Social aspects of the Treasure Coast's future. More than likely, rural lands, and agricultural uses, will have some effect on more than one of these, so I would anticipate that we will receive "homework assignments" from the Drafting Teams along with our general look at the future of rural lands.

We will need to pursue the CSTC Process within those time constraints. Therefore, the time for moving through this process will be more compressed than the BMP program development. Due to these time constraints, and the complexity of the issues, I would anticipate that the outcome of this phase of the process would take the form of a report that includes general guidelines, strategies, and preferred approaches to rural lands in the future, again under the assumption that these will be different from the current situation.

We will begin to organize the group and establish a more clear set of goals and objectives in time to present these to the full CSTC meeting on January 7, 2005. Between that date and September, we'll have quite a lot to do. It should be fascinating, though, since we plan on trying to bring in people from around the country who have attempted or accomplished innovative land use planning programs that integrate rural lands preservation and management. I'm sure that many of you will be contacted to see if you'd like to be part of this process, and we will gratefully accept volunteers.

The second effort that the RLC has identified as being important is the organization of individual County Ag Advisory Committees made up of landowners in the various counties with the goal of working more closely with County and City governments on ag and rural land issues. The Executive Committee of the RLC feels that the pace of land use conversion is so rapid that decisions are often being made without good information. The Martin County Agricultural Landowners group would serve as a template for similar efforts in St. Lucie, Indian River, Brevard, and Okeechobee Counties. We will need to present the idea to the various governments, and work out a protocol for cooperation. The goal would be to have a group that could be available to the staff and commissioners to help them make good decisions. By formalizing the Advisory Committees, the governments would know who to call when decisions come up relating to ag and rural lands.

That's pretty much where we are right now. We have successfully accomplished some important background work with the Research Symposium last September, the Rural Lands Symposium last December, and the GIS meeting earlier this year. We have contacted environmental groups, and they appear to be quite excited about the potential. The state laws relating to Rural Land Stewardship Areas were strengthened and clarified by the State Legislature this year, and they appear to be very interested in this approach. Commissioner Bronson's office is firmly supportive of our efforts, and we've had great cooperation every step of the way from the DACS people, Chuck Aller in particular. We've also received some good guidance from Chuck Littlejohn, of Littlejohn Mann in Tallahassee, who helped craft the Collier County plan and the new Rural Lands language for the legislature. We've also received some worthwhile guidance from developers, including Roy Rogers who headed up Westin for Arvida and serves on the Board of the Nature Conservancy.

Please feel free to make your feelings known or provide any input to either Doug Bournique or me. The outcome will only be as good as the effort we put into it.

Many thanks.

Pete Spyke
Chairman
Indian River Citrus League Rural Lands Committee