

Government Agency Resources for Florida Blueberry Growers¹

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Several federal, state, and local government offices and agencies offer assistance and resources to Florida blueberry growers, including disaster assistance, pesticide management, and so forth. These include UF/IFAS Extension, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and various Florida water management districts. This publication summarizes some of the resources and assistance available from each of these agencies, along with website links as a starting point for growers to use in learning more about and accessing that assistance.

University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

UF/IFAS Extension has many resources available to assist Florida blueberry growers, including local county Extension agents and publications addressing many production-related issues.

- UF/IFAS Extension offices: <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>
- Electronic Data Information Source (EDIS) Publications: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topics/blueberry>
- Disaster Preparation and Recovery: <https://disaster.ifas.ufl.edu>

USDA

The USDA provides hurricane, disaster, and other assistance to growers including through the following:

- Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) — Provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters. See <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/noninsured-crop-disaster-assistance/index>
- Tree Assistance Program (TAP) — Provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes, and vines damaged by natural disasters. See <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/disaster-assistance-program/tree-assistance-program/>
- Disaster Assistance Recovery Tool — See <https://www.farmers.gov/protection-recovery/disaster-tool> to determine available disaster assistance resources.
- Other Resources, including Emergency Farm Loans — <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs/emergency-farm-loans/index>
- Farm Service Agency (FSA) — Report disaster losses and damages to the local FSA office and/or your Approved Insurance Provider for crop insurance claims. Find

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contact information for FSA offices by county at <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=fl&agency=fsa>

- Disaster Assistance Programs At a Glance — <https://www.farmers.gov/sites/default/files/2022-07/farmersgov-disaster-assistance-brochure-07-21-2022.pdf>

FDACS

FDACS provides resources and services to the Florida agriculture industry, including:

- Pesticide applicator certification and licensing, including administering pesticide license testing and CEU requirements, and making certain CEU training is available to pesticide applicators.
 - Certification and Licensing — <https://www.fdacs.gov/Business-Services/Pesticide-Licensing/Pesticide-Applicator-Licenses/Pesticide-Applicator-Certification-and-Licensing>,
 - CEU Requirements — <https://www.fdacs.gov/Business-Services/Pesticide-Licensing/Pesticide-Applicator-Licenses/Pesticide-Applicator-Certification-and-Licensing/CEU-Requirements>, and
 - Pesticide Applicator CEUs Available through FDACS — <https://aessearch.fdacs.gov/AvailableClassSearch.asp>
- The Fresh from Florida program to promote Florida agricultural commodities (<https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Fresh-From-Florida-Industry-Membership>).
- Regulations covering the movement of blueberries from Florida to Canada and California due to the presence of the blueberry maggot (<https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Fruit-and-Vegetables/Blueberry-Regulations>).
- Florida State Agricultural Response Team (<https://flsart.org>).

Water Management Districts

St. Johns River Water Management District

It covers Brevard, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Indian River, Nassau, Seminole, St. Johns, Volusia, and portions of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Lake, Marion, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, and Putnam counties.

The St. Johns River Water Management District accepts applications for its districtwide Agricultural Cost-Share Program year-round. Through this program, the District engages farmers and growers in the shared goals of water

conservation and reduction of nutrient run-off. Award of cost-share funding is contingent on District Governing Board approval of eligible applications and funding availability. Eligible projects include those that convert to a lower quality water source, conserve water, and/or reduce nutrient runoff. This may include the following:

- Surface drip irrigation
- Soil moisture/climate sensor telemetry
- Fertilizer application equipment with GPS
- Micro-irrigation
- Irrigation/drain tile
- Tailwater recovery and reuse
- Over Saran irrigation (freeze protection)
- Precision agriculture equipment
- Variable frequency drive for pumps
- Other conservation/quality projects that meet program objectives

Information, details, and requirements are available at <https://www.sjrwmd.com/localgovernments/funding/agricultural-cost-share/>.

Southwest Florida Water Management District

It covers Citrus, DeSoto, Hardee, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Sarasota, Sumter, and portions of Charlotte, Highlands, Lake, Levy, Marion, and Polk counties.

FARMS (Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems) is a SWFWMD agricultural cost-share reimbursement program that reduces groundwater withdrawals from the Upper Floridan aquifer through conservation and alternative water supply best management practices (BMPs). In conjunction with water conservation BMPs, water quality, and natural systems improvement, BMPs also may be cost-shared in priority areas. Examples of commonly used BMPs include the following:

- Weather stations and soil moisture sensors with telemetry
- Riser culverts and water-controlled structures
- Surface water or tailwater irrigation pumps and filters
- Remote irrigation zone controls and soil moisture and climate sensor telemetry
- Fertigation systems
- Cold protection measures

Information, details, and requirements are available at <https://www.swfwmd.state.fl.us/business/agriculture/facilitating-agricultural-resource-management-systems-farms>.

South Florida Water Management District

It covers Broward, Collier, Dade, Glades, Hendry, Lee, Martin, Monroe, Palm Beach, St. Lucie, and portions of Charlotte, Highlands, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, and Polk counties.

The District's Cooperative Funding Program assists local governments, public and private water providers, and other entities with construction and/or implementation of alternative water supply (AWS) and water conservation (WC) projects that support or complement the District's mission.

Information, details, and requirements are available at <https://www.swfwmd.gov/doing-business-with-us/coop-funding>.

Suwannee River Water Management District

It covers Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor, Union and portions of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Jefferson, and Levy counties.

The District's agricultural team assists agricultural operations with cost share for advanced best management practices. This includes cost share for the following:

- irrigation system upgrades associated with water conservation, advanced irrigation scheduling, and irrigation efficiency improvements
- implementing precision agricultural practices to reduce nutrient inputs and sustain yields

Information, details, and requirements are available at <https://www.mysuwanneeriver.com/366/Agricultural-Cost-Share-Program>