

# 2011 KEYNOTE ADDRESS: The Road Ahead for Florida Agriculture

MIKE JOYNER



**Mike Joyner**

*Assistant Commissioner and Chief of Staff  
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services<sup>1</sup>*

Good morning and thank you very much. I'm going to do my best to stay behind this podium. I am absolutely convinced that there is a Baptist pastor in my background somewhere. So if I start walking around and doing the altar call you'll understand.

Let me first off say "thank you" for the opportunity to be with you and also to apologize that Commissioner Putnam couldn't be here. He has a state fair authority board meeting this morning; in fact when I finish here, I'll be going over to meet him. But, I do appreciate the opportunity that you've offered me to come in his stead. It was not lost on me when you looked up and said "Who's he?"—I understand that and will certainly do the best I can.

When Dr. Richard Tyson called me, I simply said "Dr. Tyson, unfortunately ..." as I'm the keeper of the schedule and I'm the guy who has to break the bad news. So I said, "Dr. Tyson, unfortunately Mr. Putnam cannot be there and I'd be glad to go in his stead. What would you like me to talk about?" Dr. Tyson said "about 20 minutes." And I kept pressing so I can tell you he is a stickler for time, but he did ask me to talk to the group this morning about the road ahead for Florida agriculture. And what I'd like to do before I start looking ahead is to look back just a second.

It is no breaking news to all of you that Florida's economy is facing a pretty stiff headwind. When you think about it, construction and tourism continue to suffer, but the one pillar in this economy that continues to be strong is agriculture. Despite these challenges in this economy—in Tallahassee we're constantly talking about budgets and money and cuts and those kinds of things—Florida agriculture continues to generate jobs; we continue to generate and avoid new taxes; and as I mentioned earlier, Florida agriculture continues to be the pillar of this economy.

I think Dr. Clouser was with you last night; he was a professor of mine at the University of Florida, great guy, and he probably told you that this is a one hundred billion dollar industry with over 300 commodities! And you know that, you deal with it every day, you know better than I do. So, again, when you look back in the rear view mirror you very simply see that agriculture continues to be this very strong pillar. And I can tell you that Commissioner Putnam talks to our governor often—Governor Scott—and in this educational process we will continue to do that with this new governor. And we are constantly going back to this issue: that you have got to do things that pass public policy that keep agriculture strong.

What I'd like to do next as we look ahead is talk about the three priorities and the three challenges that the commissioner has given us since he's come on board in January. The three things that we are going to be focused on over the next four years are nutrition—and you all know more about it than I do—we are going to talk a little bit about it this morning, then energy, and finally water.

## **Priority 1: Nutrition**

Let's talk about nutrition. As I was eating breakfast this morning at the Hampton Inn, one of the news shows they were talking about focused on childhood obesity. My daughter, Micah, won the Tropicana speech contest this year; her speech was "Childhood Obesity and the Academic Childhood Obesity." Everybody knows obesity is on the rise, and as it continues to rise, health care costs continue to rise and work productivity continues to decrease. And one way to counter this issue is obviously to improve the nutrition of the meals that we are eating.

Here in Florida we've got an abundance of fresh fruits and

---

<sup>1</sup>Previously with St. Joe Company, Progress Energy, Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection, Florida Forestry Association, and Florida Farm Bureau Federation

vegetables. Before I came up here, my wife brought my attention to an email. Richard Gaskalla, who you all know we brought back out of retirement, was responding to an email from a gentleman who had written a very nasty email to Commissioner Putnam regarding tomatoes dying in the field, that nobody was going in and gleaning them after the season was over with and this kind of thing, so he just fired off the email to Commissioner Putnam, so we responded. My point there is that you know in Florida we have an abundance of fresh fruit and vegetables.

By encouraging customers to eat more healthfully or consumers to eat more healthy foods, we'll instill a value of fresh produce in them earlier, but here's the catch: I want you to listen to this very closely, more importantly, for the industry it will instill this value of the industry of agriculture that we all work in. You will hear Commissioner Putnam talk about the relevancy of agriculture. We have to be relevant. We've got to be relevant to the folks in downtown Miami. They have got to understand the importance of agriculture, because quite honestly if they don't, this office will be lost, and just as I said, the importance of encouraging folks to eat healthy fruits and vegetables, it's the instilling this value of this industry that produces the food. Changing the way we eat to include fresh fruits and vegetables will increase demand for ag products and higher value for Florida's ag industry. Commissioner Putnam is focused on three areas when it comes to this issue of nutrition. He's focused on trying to expand the access of higher quality, nutritious foods for Florida in very important areas, in public assistance programs and finally in Florida's school nutrition program.

### **School nutrition program**

Have daughters, 14 and 12; both are in the public school system in Tallahassee and doing extremely well; it's a fun conversation at the dinner table each night when we talk about what they had at school that day. We simply think we can do better than what they've had in the past.

Legislatively, this year Commissioner Putnam made it a priority to go after and get the school nutrition program. It is a \$955 million program that is going to be headed by this Department of Agriculture. If the Governor signs this bill—there is concern that he will not—but if the Governor signs this bill, we will be the third state to run the school nutrition program, Texas went first and New Jersey went second. And Florida is going to be third. If the Governor signs the bill, we will immediately start working on a waiver. Commissioner Putnam spoke briefly with Secretary Hillsack last week about this issue and what we need to do to get this program. If we're successful we'll take that program in January of next year.

We think we've got the relationships I mentioned, to connect schools and school nutrition programs with growers in the area to put fresh fruits and vegetables in that cafeteria during the growing season. We hope by doing so that we'll instill values in our children at a young age for fresh and wholesome foods, which will hopefully lead to a lifetime of healthy eating.

The St. Pete Times today, or the Tribune—I haven't read it yet—has a letter from an African-American bishop out of Jacksonville that strongly supports this program. This is the wrong term and I don't want to offend anybody, but the "lunchroom ladies" support the move of this program to the Department of Agriculture. A \$955 million program, I think they have 50 nutritionists on staff, we would transfer into what is called a Type 2 Transfer, just picked them up and drop them in the Department of Agriculture, so stay tuned on that again. We've done all we

can to convince the Governor, we've gotten letters out of Texas and New Jersey explaining how much the program has done for them. Hopefully these will help answer some of the questions that Governor Scott keeps asking and help support this move.

Let's shift gears. Commissioner Putnam has visited areas of the state where these programs are already in place, like Palm Beach County. There is a grower in Palm Beach County who has an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables. He has worked very closely through contracts with the school system to provide those schools with fresh fruits and vegetables at reduced cost. Commissioner Putnam was down there several weeks ago, serving those fresh fruits and vegetables. The farmers found a demand for their abundance and the schools are able to access more wholesome foods at a price they can afford as opposed to letting produce die out in the fields.

In Hillsborough County, there's a great program that the Department of Ag manages called Gardening for Grades. Here in St. Pete there is a school that grows its own backyard garden. The school grows cucumbers, okra, and other things; they go out and harvest the produce and eat it at lunch the next day. That's another program through the Department of Agriculture.

With the transfer of the school nutrition programs to DACS we'll be able to put all the regions' programs like Farms for Schools and Gardening for Grades, so that it will make a difference in all of the school nutrition programs.

### **Assistance programs**

Let me mention another—Richard please watch my time, I know, 20 minutes. But there are other ways that the Commissioner is working to expand access to Florida produce: he's working to connect local farms with help assistance programs and non-profits that can reach the urban core. There's a great non-profit group out of Miami/Dade that goes by the name of Wholesome Way. I don't know if any of you are familiar with this group. But what Wholesome Way does as a non-profit is that they will actually go in and double the redemption value of the SNAP (supplemental nutrition assistance program) program. So you go in with your SNAP card and if you buy fruits and vegetables with that card, you get double the amount. If you've got \$50 on that card and you go to their market and buy fruits and vegetables, you can actually get \$100 worth of fruits and vegetables. So we've been working closely with Wholesome Way and we're also looking into purchasing EBT card reader to put in markets throughout the state. We've also just hired someone to come in to be the crew chief of our farmers' markets. That is to be part of the program to get farmers' markets focused to bring them back as that central market place that they are. But there are groups like Wholesome Way that we have this great relationship with that will really help in this area. At the end of the day, Floridians will be eating fruits and vegetables, farmers will make a profit, and as I said earlier, agriculture will become more relevant to everyone.

Just think of the opportunity we have being in that school cafeteria every day. Just think of the educational opportunities working with IFAS and others, if we can be in that school cafeteria every day.

### **Priority 2: Energy**

Let's talk about energy, the second priority. During the Florida legislative session this year, the legislature chose to move the energy program, the Office of Energy, from the Governor's office to the Department of Agriculture. People really like Com-

missioner Putnam, and they really think he can get the job done. They moved the energy office to us during the legislative session. At the Department we are focused on sustaining agriculture to include this energy production. With its vast lands and bright sun, Florida has the opportunity to be a leader in production of renewable energy. Here's what we think: not only will agriculture aid in this industry with renewable energy production, but also it will produce jobs in rural communities. I'm sure that Dr. Clouser talked to you about that last evening. But this also diversify opportunities for Florida agriculture.

Here is full disclosure: I worked for the Department of Environmental Protection as the Chief of Staff for a guy named David Struhs under Governor Bush. The energy office was under my care and feeding. I then went out and worked for Progress Energy and worked with the energy office. Late one evening during the legislative session, the Commissioner and I got called into a leadership meeting again to simply say: we want you to do the energy office. And the Commissioner said jokingly "Okay, 24 hour rule." In our office when we have to make an important decision about something, then we don't do anything for 24 hours. There's a different look in the agriculture department right now with the diversified background of our staff, so anyway we're arguing this issue and I raise my hand and say "Commissioner, trust me, you do not want this energy office, it's a loser, it's a dog. I'm telling you don't take this energy office."

There are so many competing interests, the investor on utilities, the coops, the renewal, folks you'll never get anything done. And the Commissioner very quietly said, and if you know him, the Commissioner just sits and listens. He said "You know something Mike, at the end of the day if I don't take the opportunity to work with agriculture to develop energy products on their property and to get them the supplemental income that may keep them on the farm, then shame on me."

And at that point in the discussion it was over and I simply said "How do you want me to execute this?" We then walked down the next day and said if you want to give it to us, we'll take it. And not only will we take it, we'll do the very best job we can with it and we will come up with a strategic energy policy for the state that I don't think we've ever had. We're going to work closely together with Governor Scott, who just hired Dr. Mary Bain, who we think the world of. Dr. Bain came out of the Public Service Commission to be his energy czar and we look forward to working with her. Again, we think if we do it right, we can create jobs in all areas; we think we can diversify the opportunity for agriculture; and we think we can ensure long-term sustainability for the industry.

### **Priority 3: Water**

Let's talk about water, because I know, again, that all of these are areas that you work in every day. If Commissioner Putnam were here today, everywhere he goes, one of the things he says and those of you that have heard him speak before know he will say he believes that one of the most significant long-term issues facing agriculture is water. Not only will he say that, but he will say that it is the most significant issue facing the state.

Think about this, whether you're planting an orange grove in Polk County, or you're going to save the Everglades, or whether you're going to build a subdivision in Orange County, it all boils down to water. It really does. We've got to work together to ensure that we have a water supply to meet the current and future needs for Floridians, especially for agricultural needs.

### **EPA water standards**

In Florida, we are working and have worked over the years to establish and maintain a high quality standard for water quality supported by sound science and attainable government. And we do not believe that the EPA's numeric nutrient criteria is the way to go. I have the utmost respect for the EPA. When I was with the EPA I worked closely with the Washington folks and the Region Four folks, in fact the Region Four folks are some of the best friends I've got. But EPA is flat out wrong on this issue and it's not the solution. We do not believe and we feel very strongly about this: that these requirements are not based on sound science and they are certainly not attainable. And we believe that they will be detrimental to Florida's economy. But I do think, and I may be naïve on this one, I'm usually not naïve on things, I do think we are heading for a solution.

I don't know if you all had the opportunity to meet or speak with Secretary Herschel Vinyard. But I've gotten to know him very well. He's been in my home, and was having dinner with my family about two weeks ago. He is a very good man and a smart guy; he's done a good thing and kept a lot of the people who were there when I was there. People like Joseph Fitzwalter, who is a very good water attorney—he has kept them there to continue giving sound advice. You guys know that Commissioner Putnam partnered with Attorney General Pam Bondi in a Stop/Halt lawsuit against the EPA for this issue. And what we've done is ask the EPA to rescind the numeric nutrient criteria based on their guidelines issued in March. You're going to hear a lot more of this from your other speakers today, but here is the bottom line, here is what I think: I think the EPA made a quick knee-jerk decision on the numeric nutrient criteria issue when they basically said some time about a year or so ago, if Florida was not meeting the Clean Water Act. I think that State Senator Jackson went before Congress and got beat up pretty badly. I think a lot of her; I think she's a smart person. And I may have turned and said let's rethink this whole issue. I think it was back in May or March (2011), when the EPA came out with their list and said if you do these things we believe you met the Clean Water Act.

What we hope will happen, we've responded, we've worked very closely with DEP, we crafted a letter for Secretary Vinyard to send to the EPA saying we meet this criteria (I think there are nine criteria). And we clearly think we've met the criteria; we think the EPA is being to regroup to look at that issue differently and I believe, and I may be again very naïve on this issue, but I really do believe the EPA may come back and rescind the determination they made earlier that Florida just didn't meet the Clean Water Act. You all know better than I do because you're out there on the ground, that Florida's adopted rules for a variety of ag operations including citrus, container nurseries, I mean the work you do, has gone into every one of those. Forestry best management practices, cattle best management practices, container nurseries, we've got at this point over 8 million acres of Florida agriculture that is currently implementing best management practices. We've also got the specific things like watershed rules like Everglades and things like that. Bottom line on this one is Florida believes it's doing the right thing and I think the EPA will work with us on this. Florida has made significant progress in improving the quality of the water and we should continue to manage this issue at the state level. It is very simply a state issue and we think that Florida's EPA has done a very good job of it working with Rich Dell and others in our shop over the years.

## Water quantity

Let me begin to wrap this up. We talked about water quality; now let's talk about water quantity. If we want to attract businesses and create jobs, we've got to make sure we have the water supply to meet the needs and we've got to find ways to grow this water supply. Alternative water supplies can help us grow and the quantity of water we would have available for use in Florida. There are a number of things, the collection and storage of storm water, for example, as an effective way to grow our water supply and therefore meet many of our needs. Storm water can be used for landscape and golf course irrigation, agricultural irrigation, and the list goes on and on. Also, water reuse is another way to grow our water supply. St. Pete, as we sit here in this beautiful facility this morning, as you know, is a prime example of how communities can use an alternative water supply to meet their needs. St. Pete's water reclamation system is not only the first to be built but it's one of the largest facilities in the world. St. Pete's water reclamation system provides over 37 million gallons per day to over 10,000 customers.

Let me give you an example of that. Where Florida has been focused on water management since the early 1980s, whereas we states like our own management, Florida reuses an average of 30 gallons of water per person per day. In comparison, California reuses 3 gallons of water per person per day.

Innovative solutions don't come cheap and success of the water policy is dependent on a commitment to share the cost of

developing alternative water supplies. Commissioner Putnam is committed to coordinating and collaborating with other elected officials in key numbers to be sure and remains cognizant of the need for water tomorrow. Those are the three priorities. I'm a real simple guy, so in our office we just say NEW—nutrition, energy, and water. Those are the thoughts of Commissioner Putnam. He's been a great guy to work for, to work with, a smart person, and I'm extremely excited.

Well, let me finish up with this, I know you're supposed to have a strong closing, but this is heartfelt. First, let me thank you for what you do every day. I've seen some of your association awards, from the Florida Farm Bureau, the Florida Forestry Association; I've seen a DEP. I've seen a lot of different ways that you do fantastic work, and you just quietly go back to your business and produce the information and you educate and you do things that need to be done, so I can stand up here and talk about all of these great 8 million acres in Florida. Let me thank you for that. And secondly, let me say how important it is to be a member of an association like this. I'm a huge fan of associations; not only did I work for associations for about 14 years, but I've been on that other side. I've been in government; I've been outside looking in. I've seen firsthand the impact that associations can have. At DEP, I've seen it at the Governor's office; I worked real closely with Governor Bush and I know how loudly associations speak. So let me encourage you—there's a lot of things you could be doing and let me just say thank you for your involvement in this association.