



**STATE ISSUE:**           **THE IDENTIFICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INCENTIVES TO ENSURE THE CONTINUED GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY OF FLORIDA'S NURSERY AND AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY.**

**POSITION:**               FNGLA supports local and state programs which provide incentives to nursery and agricultural landowners to keep their land in production.

**BACKGROUND:**       Florida's nursery and agricultural industry is in jeopardy due to land development pressures associated with rising land values, competition for water, market conditions, introduction of foreign pests and diseases, overall public perception and unstable weather patterns. Independently, these factors can be absorbed. However, together they are forcing agricultural landowners to choose between developing their lands and remaining in production. Adding to these overarching pressures, nursery and agricultural producers often find themselves at odds with local governments which believe growth can be curbed by limiting or prohibiting agricultural landowners from changing the use of their lands through the comprehensive planning process. This paradigm further underscores the difficult decisions about the future of nursery and agricultural production operations in Florida.

Loss of agricultural lands greatly accelerates the urbanization of Florida's rural areas. This causes immediate and irreversible impacts to the state's economy, water and natural resources, and the overall quality of life enjoyed by Florida residents and tourists. State and local elected officials must not lose sight of the fact that agricultural producers are price takers, not price makers. Although agricultural business is challenging, Florida produces more agricultural products on less acres and American consumers still pay less for agricultural products than anyone else in the world. Agricultural leaders must actively work with local and state officials to identify and create mechanisms and/or incentives which encourage the continued viability of agricultural land uses. Local and state regulators must also provide flexibility and assurances that agricultural landowners will not be regulated or treated as Florida's only "green space" thereby devaluing parcels of agricultural land and undermining a farmer's needed collateral for lines of credit.

Incentives must be creative and innovative, yet sufficiently practical for landowners to utilize. FNGLA believes the following tools provide nursery and agricultural landowners incentives to keep Florida's agricultural industry a strong component of the state's economy:

- Sales tax exemptions for all components of agricultural production.
- Hurricane disaster assistance via low or no-interest loans, insurance and partnerships with state and local governments
- Maintain and strengthen Florida's agricultural assessment "Greenbelt Classification"
- Strengthen Florida's private property rights
- Expand the regulatory incentives of state-approved Best Management Practices
- Water conservation and consumptive use
- Incentives for development and production of crops used in alternative fuels
- Tort reform
- Expansion of marketing and promotion programs for Florida nursery, foliage and other agricultural crops.