



# FLORIDA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

THE VOICE OF AGRICULTURE

## SOUTH FLORIDA ALGAE BLOOM OVERVIEW

Toxic blue-green algae blooms fueled by unusually warm weather, heavy rain, local storm water runoff and septic tanks have contaminated several lakes, rivers and canals in South Florida. In June Gov. Rick Scott [declared a state of emergency](#) in Martin, St. Lucie, Lee and Palm Beach counties. What you need to know:

- While any property can contribute to nutrient runoff, residual lake sediment is the primary source of nutrient loading in the St. Lucie estuary. Conservation farming techniques followed by today's farm families save and improve water quality.
- Farmers and ranchers are excellent stewards of the land; they produce our food and fiber and work every day to protect the land and water from which they make a living.
- Farm families make a living from the soil and are focused on conserving our natural resources for their future as well as ours. Water use on Florida farms has continuously declined since the 1980's. State officials report that farmers and ranchers conserve more than 12 billion gallons of fresh water each year.
- Nearly 90 percent of state residents agree or strongly agree that farmers are concerned about water when making decisions, and almost 80 percent think farmers use sound reasoning when making decisions about water. <http://www.piecenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/agwater2.pdf>.
- Farms in the Everglades Agricultural Area have reduced phosphorus content in water leaving their land by 70 percent in one year.
- Farmers in the Lake Okeechobee Watershed region are **required** to implement state-of-the-art nutrient management practices. They have installed these water conservation and protection systems on more than 330,000 acres.
- Research scientist Brian Lapointe with *Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute* has determined that septic tanks and drain fields are a major nitrogen source fueling blue-green algae blooms in the Indian River Lagoon. (see study [Evidence of sewage-driven eutrophication and harmful algal blooms in Florida's Indian River Lagoon](#)).
- Algae blooms occurred in 2014 when no water from Lake Okeechobee was released by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from Lake Okeechobee (see [South Florida Water Management District Fact Sheet](#)).
- Human population growth along the Indian River lagoon increased by 18 percent between 2000 and 2010. More than two million people populate the shorelines in a six-county region surrounding the lagoon.
- In 2011, two massive algae blooms destroyed 60 percent of the aquatic grass in the ecosystems and are reported to have caused the deaths of pelicans, dolphins and other species.
- Algae blooms are fueled by warm weather and by water enriched with nutrients, such as those found in septic tanks and stagnant water. There is no effective short-term solution to stop the algae or remove it from the water. We need collaboration from all communities to find a long-term solution based on sound science.