9/2/2026 at 4:30pm

St. Johns County Equestrian Center

8200 Smith Rd, Hastings, FL

AAC Member Attendance:

☒ Christine “Chris” Wilson

☒ Bryan Jones

☒ Jackee Dobish

☒ Bill Hamilton

☒ Carleton Johns

☐ Chuck Owen

☐ Scott Parker

County Staff and Commission:

Ann Taylor, SJC Commissioner Co-Chair

Prissy Fletcher, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (OIA)

Christine Valliere, OIA and Eco. Dev.

Kealey West, Office of the County Attorney

PRISSY

It helps tremendously with putting the meeting minutes in order. So, just want you to be aware that we are recording. Thank you.

CHRIS

I'm going to call the order. I'm Chris Wilson, Wilson Family Farms

BRYAN

Bryan Jones, Riverdale

BILL

Bill Hamilton, Southern Horticulture

CARLETON

Carleton Johns, Tater Farms

CHRISTINE

Christine Valliere, SJC's Economic Development and Intergovernmental Affairs Director

KEALEY

Kealy West, Office of County Attorney

COMMISSIONER

Anne Taylor, County Commissioner

PRISSY

Prissy Fletcher, Agricultural Liaison

CHRISTINE

Okay, everybody gets minutes from April, May, and August.

MARYANN

Right now, you have the last one, August. Do we have April one minute available?

KEALEY

Through the chair, if I recall of the last meeting, April, May, they were presented. However, there was never take a vote on them. So they were presented in the last meeting, the August meeting, and then there was just so administrative issue is that there was not a vote taken, and so that's why they're coming back at this week, and that's why.

BRYAN

I got distracted.

CHRISTINE

Sorry, that's your price. I'm sorry,

KEALEY

that's okay.

AMY

So yeah, can those minutes be found on the website for the public record?

KEALEY

Sure. Once they're approved, we'll be posted to the website.

CHRISTINE

Okay, county reports.

GREG

Excuse me, because we can't hear back here. Can we get those fans turned off. Sure.

KEALEY

So just yeah, just get a motion on the minutes and then a second, then take your vote.

Bryan makes a motion. Carleton seconds.

CHRIS

All in favor. 5-0. Minutes accepted.

CHRIS

Okay, Prissy, are you here for county IFAS contract?

PRISSY

We are still awaiting feedback. Kealy, Christine, if you mind.

KEALEY

So we we received a template contract from IFAS that they give out to all their counties or haven't given out to all their counties with regard to their memorandum of Understanding of the different counties in which they work, IFAs in every county in the in the state. So we looked at that contract, and from a legal point of view, I did my review. And the fact that the monetary was there, there were some issues. I made changes to that, suggested edits to make it in line with the statutory requirements we have with IFAS, as well as adding deliverables for the cost of things that they're doing, and so we sent a revised draft to IFIS, and we have yet to hear back we have set a placeholder for it to go to our September 15th meeting because that is the last meeting before the end of the fiscal year (two weeks). Yep, and so because that's when their current contract expires, and so the goal is to have that you know moving that forward substantively. You know we're waiting to get feedback from them regarding. I think that's from the legal side. I think Christine is more involved in the direct negotiation devices. Yes.

CHRISTINE

So, as Kealey said, we're still negotiating. We're waiting for their feedback on the record.

CHRIS

So there is no update at this moment?

CHRISTINE

No.

BRYAN

So, at our last meeting, we had heard that the dean was going to have a meeting with y'all or somebody.

CHRISTINE

We're still waiting. Still waiting. They're developing strategic plans for each of the county ag extension offices. So we were we were told that ours will be finalized soon, and then the dean will set up a meeting to discuss that with us. The strategic plan will not be part of the MOU as UF uses it, so we'll have more to share.

PRISSY

We immediately survey results that was supposed to be followed up with the County.

BILL

So that the strategic plan was-that's what that survey review meeting was as opposed to the MOU, which is the understanding of the University of Florida. So they're no, they're not necessarily one bound to the other.

CHRISTINE

Correct.

BILL

Right. The MOU-that's the governing document.

CHRISTINE

Correct. Fair enough.

BRYAN

When was that redone? When was has that been revised or is it updated?

CHRISTINE

That's what we're negotiating.

BRYAN

Yes. Oh, that's what that part.

CHRISTINE

Yes, The strategic plan is something new. I understand with the changes in how IFAS is managed. You know, the district managers have been consolidated into one oversight through Gay Zone, so I think as part of the change in their oversight process, they're developing the strategic plan.

BRYAN

So in your communications with them, or from the county's communication, I mean, has there been any feedback at all as to what we're asking, or is it just kind of a no? This is what we want.

CHRISTINE

We're still in that process.

BRYAN

It's still going on, and I mean they're clear of what the deadline is, right?

CHRISTINE

Yes, and they're clear of what our deadline is to get to the September 15.

BRYAN

Yeah, and so let's fast forward to September 16, and we have no signed contract. What are...

CHRISTINE

We can continue to negotiate. We can look at whatever support they think they need from the county to continue the key programs that are active right now, typically 4-H and Master Gardeners program.

BRYAN

Our funding from the county side continues until

CHRISTINE

No, our funding ends on September 30. September 30.

BRYAN

That's what I'm asking. So the issue is we've got the county commission on the 15th to approve or adjust or whatever. So as of September 16, we will pay through September 30 and then stop.

CHRISTINE

Yes.

BRYAN

Okay. And then, what is the timeline that you guys feel is appropriate from that point. What's normal? Is it a six-month deal? I mean, we've been working on this for a while, and it's embarrassing to me that there's been no urgency on the other half. I mean, I guess in their world, we're just going to pay, pay, pay. pay, pay like the ball's done. Frankly, I'm kind of tired of just throwing it away. So, you know, I think that message has been sent out, but I think they're too big to fail, and it's frustrating. It genuinely is.

KEALEY

I think there's some other outside factors too. I think when we're talking about budgetary, I'm sorry, through the chair, through the vice chair. When we're talking about budgetary matters right now, and as you understand, the county, the amendment three, and so I think a lot of counties are navigating their budgets and figuring out, you know, costs and things like that, and I think that's also being pushed from the UF. And different cost scenarios are being talked about. So I imagine they're having internal conversations because you know counties right now, well Amendment Number Three would not affect this current budget year, but it would affect the next budget if it passes, whether it does or doesn't does not. I don't care, and so I think that's adding to things that we're looking at and entering into that involve budget.

CARLETON

Is the county, are they penalized by the state if they let it lapse?

KEALEY

No, no.

CARLETON

Okay

KEALEY

and that's one of the things I argue. There's no statutory obligation to enter into an agreement with IFAS and have an extension service. However, if you do, then there are some statutory triggers, and that's what we had to do. But there's no statutory obligation to actually enter into that agreement, so there'll be no penalty.

BILL

I think there is a statutory obligation for U.S. to have extension programs for every county.

KEALEY

There is not.

BILL

For them, well, they're land grant college, and they're required to. There's three criteria that they're required to provide to receive the $800 million budget from the federal government, which the state of Florida has contributed to, which the budget is like 1.2 billion dollars for as a land grant college to maintain those three programs. That extension is one of them. So if they default on the extension part, then they're no longer fulfilling the requirements as a land grant college, and I think that's a legal issue that needs to be explored because they need us. They need the extension. They need to be able to work out extension with counties. So, I mean, that's really a turning, but that's simply what it is.

CHRIS

We're not arguing the money? We're just arguing deliverables? That's it?

KEALEY

No. We're waiting to hear back, and we're looking at deliverables.

BRYAN

I think we have to. I mean, I think statewide we're the only one that's doing 80%. I mean, that's a that's a hard note from me, my voice, because it's just why, right? If every other county's you know at 40% then that's that's the benchmark. Nobody else has said, "Oh man, look at St. Johns County. They're doing 80. We should all do 80. No, the trouble that I have, to be honest with you, is with my communications and chit chats around the state, you know there there are a lot of talk about well let's see what happens in November, right? But you know we could go years back, and it wouldn't have been an issue, right? And I know this is a big one. I get it. I mean, we're talking probably hundreds of millions of dollars just for St. Johns County, right? But you know, when we go statewide, we're talking megabucks. But there was a value to that that St. Johns County saw, and it would have never been an issue, right? So all these other counties are like, you know, Clay County. My sister lives in Clay County, and they're pretty frustrated over there as well. They're trying to figure out from a county commission side, what are we going to do? Because we're not really thrilled with what's going on, right? So I know that Hillsborough, where my uncle lives, same thing. So you know, I'm able to put some feelers out when you have a dean that sits there and tells us that you know ag is there, but there's other parts to it. It's a loud and clear message to a to a producer, right? I mean, there is no importance like there used to be. The importance is them getting published. I, there's farmers in this room that have farmed way longer than I have, but I'm part of a farm that's been going for 65 years, and frankly, Riverdale's tired of fighting the land grant institution that's supposed to fight for us, right? And it's that's a mighty big frustration for sure.

CHRISTINE

It is, but I can tell you in the conversations we've had with you have, they've shared feedback that other counties are letting them know if Amendment Three passes, they will consider discontinuing their support of their local extension office. One nuance about this proposed tax reform-I'm not even for or against it, but just informational purposes. It's not just an increase in the homestead exemption that will reduce revenues. It also comes with restrictions on how property tax revenues can be spent, so I think that's the nuance that may may not allow local government to self-determine and prioritize where they want to spend their money. So that's the difference.

BRYAN

It's terrifying because you know people see that you know oh the government's going to save the money, but absolutely not. We're going to be taxed even more, and it's just it's just mind-boggling.

CHRISTINE

So, so to accommodate that, you know, this agreement and you have said other agreements are looking at excuse me a much shorter term instead of a five-year term. This would just be a one-year term with a 90-day termination for convenience within that one-year term, so that lets everybody get through November 3rd, assess what we're dealing with, have time to to pivot, shift, and make decisions from there.

BRYAN

So it's September 2nd, and I'm so sorry if I'm taking your breath, but it's September 2. Realistically, I mean, if if there's been no back and forth, like...

CHRISTINE

I wouldn't say there's no back and forth. Well, to be honest and fair, I mean there's no back and forth. It's just we're not...

BRYAN

Gaining price to price, right? So we're not close. So you know, in my opinion, just my opinion, right? I don't want to force something to force it. It doesn't make sense to rush through something just because they drag their feet. Does not make sense to me. So you know what I'm curious about as of September 30th, or is there 31 days? no 30. So as of October 1, if we're no longer funding, right? Is that going to be an opportunity for us to discuss like what the future is, or is that yeah? I mean, I...

CHRISTINE

I think so. Okay, we'll know more by the end of this week. Whether we start looking at backup plans.

BRYAN

Okay.

CHRIS

...and shoot ourselves in the foot. You know.

MARYANN

Point of clarification, please. Sure. Okay. I thought this committee was to serve. I'm reading right from your website a bridge between the agricultural community and county leadership. Okay, why are we deciding on whether the extension center continues or not? Is that part of it?

BRYAN

That's 100% part of it.

MARYANN

Okay, it's not in the description.

BRYAN

Yeah, no, that's their.

MARYANN

I mean, so you're on the funding side.

CARLETON

Well, they're deciding. We're just. I think ultimately, it sounds like it but we're not. We're not deciding.

CHRISTINE

They're not making recommendations at all.

MARYANN

So what are you

PRISSY

We are letting them know where we are in contract status and that the answers are waiting for UF to respond.

MARYANN

Okay, that would be it, right?

BRYAN

Because they're here for us. Yeah, extension is is a service for ag. I mean, and from what I've understood, lots of other things. But yeah, so that's the that's the step there between ag and our leadership in the county, because the deliverables that we haven't received or have felt that they've fallen short is.

KEALEY

That's a county facility, and so as part of the backup plan, we're discussing is how we continue beyond that date with certain other programs, the 4-H and the master gardeners.

BRYAN

The ag center would remain open, or any other volunteer group. I mean.

KEALEY

we would yeah. So those are things that we would discuss with any contract that adds. Is there where does the county need to step in, fulfill obligations owed to those different organizations?

BRYAN

Because we 100% want 4-H master gardeners. Those volunteer groups we want to be able to use that ag center.

BILL

To make it clear to her that the staff at the Ag Center are employees of the University of Florida, and they're asking St. Johns County to pay for all of that.

MARYANN

Are they 100% paid by?

BILL

They're 80 at this point. They're 80% funding. Yeah, but they're asking now for 100% funding, and they work for the University of Florida, and St. Johns County has no input in how that's managed, and that's the frustration that some of the farm community feels based on the fact that St. Johns County is paying for that, but the program has not been managed to benefit the farm community. That's the complaint, and that's the row.

CARLETON

The extension is for the entire county, but a large, but a large portion of the money and the salaries and the whatnot are, in theory, devoted towards the commercial ag community, and that's where the road is because they don't feel like they're getting the bang for the

buck. So it's not trying to just cut the budget to zero, but 4-H, master gardeners, beekeepers, any other things that are used out there don't require the however large the staff is.

AMY

So seriously, that's 100 incorrect. Completely.

CARLETON

Okay, I'm just trying to explain to you. I'm trying to explain to you why. I'm trying.

MARYANN

Yeah, I'm trying to understand the dynamics.

CARLETON

The discussion here is coming from the commercial ag sector.

MARYANN

Okay, all right.

CHRIS

Like we're fifth generation farm. We can we can continue without fighters, but we don't need them. That's what we're trying to say. I mean, we believe we would love to need them. We would love to want them, but up until recently, the communication has been broken down so badly that we don't even go to AG for anything anymore.

MARYANN

So this committee, is advisory and has liaisons?

BRYAN

I mean, Danny, how long have you gone back and forth? If you don't mind my asking.

DANNY

We constantly have challenge. We like just there with your partners in it. We count on them for having research done. That's everybody looks to to have oversight on what our recommendations for live recommendations are. I've worked with them my whole career and done battle with them every day, but I'm their biggest supporter too at the same time.

BRYAN

But it's been a back and forth for.

MARYANN

I know Prissy is not new to this. She was the ag agent, so I mean she's very familiar with what what's here.

PRISSY

Which is why we've had monthly meetings with the Ag Center director, and we're just trying to make sure that everyone's in the loop about the discussions that we're having. We're being really honest about where we are in contract. We're waiting for UF to respond and talk about what they do or don't agree with.

CHRISTINE

Okay, we get back to the agenda.

CHRIS

Yep, absolutely.

CHRISTINE

Okay, I just wanted to share this with you all, looking specifically at the third page starts at the top. Just reminding everybody of the duties and responsibilities of this organization, and to help guide further discussions as we move forward in this process, we've shared a lot, heard a lot about what's wrong, what needs, what should change. But I would encourage this board to focus on solutions and move forward from What the concerns are into a more productive phase. There was a lot of information shared at the last meeting, and we did get some negative feedback on the tone tenor of that meeting. So I would encourage you to review this. We will be mindful in reviewing this as we create agendas moving forward, so we can share information but also share solutions.

BRYAN

Absolutely. I apologize.

Kealey

Very good.

BRYAN

Just a lot of frustration from a lot, a lot of years.

BRYAN

I apologize.

CHRISTINE

our fourth meeting, so I think we've heard a lot about what's happened in the past, and I think we're ready to shift into more solution-based discussions.

PRISSY

So I have two topics that I wanted to bring up to you, just based off of the input that I'm getting at work, and there is so much interest in our local restaurants, our food systems industry here in St. Johns County, and I understand that many of you, you have commercial contracts, are obligated to provide your produce too. But there is interest. So Jackee and I volunteer with Slow Food, and we are getting together with the visitors bureau to get our local restaurants more aware of where they can get their produce from. Do you think that's something that the farmers would like to participate in and just share? Like, hey, this is what we have to offer right now.

CHRIS

I think it's great. I mean, I already I'm connected with restaurants and we already supply some of the restaurants and they put it on the menu and so we could do it sometimes. I think it's a great idea.

CARLETON

Send you out a database with all the farmers. Anyone who's interested in in contributing or paying contribute because I'm not paying calls weekly. I've passed the address, and I thought, you know,

say no, explain the whole thing, and the evidence and all that, just get on the list, and they're willing to be able to. I can do that, and and what what they have to offer, and that way the restaurants can work.

PRISSY

The reason I'm asking as well is because Commissioner Taylor and the board have tasked us with assisting a new program for daycares that would incorporate local produce, and so we're trying to explore not just for daycares how can we help all the industries that want to supply local products to be connected, but also it's educating them like you said, like who can sell to you, who has that option, getting that inventory together. All right, awesome, thank you. All right, my next topic is friends nonprofit explorations. Are y'all familiar with groups like Friends of the Library? Okay, so those are nonprofit groups that are volunteer-based, so they can assist with fundraising. They can assist with educational promotions. For example, the Friends of the Library invited me to come and talk about the county seed library program, and they were able to use their funds to help readers need to buy datil-

specific products and other seed products to help promote local, and that's something we could do as well. And we have talked individually, especially about scholarships for the ag community. And of course, council already does something like that that we really admire. And something that I think would be great for us if we could start. And I already had the blessing from family, the Chris Barnes Memorial Scholarship. Our friend Chris Barnes, who passed away several years ago, we could do a scholarship in his name for any student that wanted to study any avenue of agriculture or horticulture. That's just one idea, but I bring this up because there are so many people that contact me that want to be involved with this committee, but they're not eligible because they're not farmers. So they want to support you. They want to help. They want to help take notes. Thank you, Erin! It would just be a way that we could allow the community to be engaged. Because I don't want to tell people, no, you can't be involved because you don't own or manage a farm. If we want everyone to be aware and be part of this, I think that could be an option to help bring that incorporation in. So, just wanted to know if I had a blessing to pursue.

CHRIS

Fundraisers, whatever you guys need to make that happen. I'm in.

JACKEE

Is that something that we could get done by this committee right now?

PRISSY

Miss Attorney, what's the timeline for a nonprofit?

JACKEE

Because so I have an event in December that we had talked about that we would do a portion of our proceeds to that, or we could like hold them to make it happen, give them to next year or something.

KEALEY

I'll give my my thoughts here. It would be nonprofit, as I'm understanding what's being said, would be separate and apart from this. And part of that would be, you know, because of the interaction with the county, there are certain rules that we would watch with regard to could you sit on that board? Probably not, because you can't do justice with your family. You can't do both. And so there's some there's some legal things you, as board members, committee members, would have to be talking just because of the interaction with the county. But by all means, anybody can form a nonprofit corporation, and they get to decide in their charter and their bylaws what they want to do and who they want to give money to and stuff like that. The committee is an advisory committee, so it doesn't have a means of accepting funding. We wouldn't allow that, but it certainly could be if you had a fundraiser and the nonprofit was properly formed. You know that might be something you think about: is who outside of this group would necessarily want to form and be on that committee or that nonprofit. I mean, there's there's things to do that way, but yeah, you could certainly do that. As far as the timing, it wouldn't be something the county would necessarily do. I certainly give pursue some guidance on it, but it would be a it would be an independent nonprofit separate from the county.

JENA

Yeah, if I may, am I allowed to speak for a moment? I'm sorry to interrupt, but I don't know if it would be helpful. Hastings Main Street is a nonprofit, and if we could, I feel like that may fall within the realm of our mission, so if you would like us to host it and partner with you, holding the proceeds to benefit the scholarship or whatever you deem, we'd be happy to support. I think our missions and goals are aligned, and we might be able to support you guys in that way.

PRISSY

Thank you. Thank you. That's awesome. Well, that's all that I have, Commissioner Tayor. Do you have anything you wanted to share before going to do the individual members?

COMMISSIONER

I don't. I don't. I did mention yesterday, though. It's first off, so nice to be here. Thank you for the invitation. Thank you for all you do. I'm really excited about that program with the preschool, our local thing. What. thing that that's about it. That if we can get our youngsters, like from one to four, to eat healthier, that that is going to carry out much, you

know, a lot of these are due start when they're really young. So I'm really excited about that program. So thank you to those that will participate, and then just that program that you put on that I went to last week to help save our ag land. So we just got to keep you guys all in business. Yes. So that was a huge, huge priority. But anyway, the decisive year. So yeah, thank you for being here.

BRYAN

Well, we want to keep the youngsters excited past four, you know.

COMMISSIONER

Yes. Well, eventually, I think we'd like to get to read into the schools. Oh yeah. But this particular program is not a particular school, a preschool, and then support. We're just trying to start, and then hopefully it's kind of a pilot program, and then we'll grow. But I would love that. I mean, because we all know what happened before with the Michelle Obama's program in the schools and everything went to everything met the garbage when it ended. That's last thing we want to do. But if we can get our kids to eat something healthier.

BRYAN

But I'd be willing to you know put a garden there and have some of it. We got to have a champion of ag at the school or the preschool. I know what you're saying. So someone that's if they're willing to maintain it and do it, then I'll supply the seeds. I mean, if we do raised bed or something.

KEALEY

They just change gas through the chair to the chair. You actually were in that meeting. Yes, I can't remember. I'm sorry.

PRISSY

Yeah, Natalie.

KEALEY

Yeah, the nutrition program that she, the organic nutrition program that she's trying to introduce into the school.

BRYAN

That's awesome.

COMMISSIONER

And it kind of embarked on a GP. That's right. And just a little bit east of 95. Yep. So they change names a little bit. I'm trying to think of what it's called now. I don't remember, but anyway, there. I love that idea of a garden.

CHRIS

Southwood has that. Southwood has my grandson.

COMMISSIONER

That's nice.

CHRIS

That makes sense because we're in our too. Okay. Okay. Okay. Committee member reports.

JACKEE

You weren't here at the last meeting, but we have an event in December, december 5 and sixth. I talked about me about being one of our judges and stuff. We're doing a two-day event at the fairgrounds. I have my final meeting tomorrow with Parks and Rec. I'm trying to see what the county, if we can, kind of work together and make this our version of a county fair. We're doing our own blue ribbon contest. I have reached out to 4-H. I have not heard back. So we're doing a few things. But what I thought would be cool is that we can do an actual like farmer Q and A. I have two people coming out to do some horse clinics. I have

Cracker Swamp Cattle Company coming out to do like roadway cattle and bunch. horse and cattle stuff out there, but I'd love it if any of you guys would like to come and talk, even give like a little speech, december 5 and sixth, Saturday and Sunday at the fairgrounds.

CHRIS

This is your plan?

JACKEE

Yeah. This is this is Paul and I. Oh, yeah, we did it last year. No, well, ideally, if we were able to kind of work it into because Prissy and I were talking about a nonprofit, I'd love to be able to give some of the proceeds to at to keep them in at the scholarship thing, I think, is. I mean, I think that's a killer idea. But no, we don't have any sponsors for this. We don't have anything. It's all nice. We did it last year. Maria was a part of it last year. There was a free course virus at the same time. So like the one weekend we had, we did not have courses at it. This year they're busy, but we do have some horses coming. But we want this to be in every year. We don't have county fair, and I went to the local county fairs, and they were food trucks from that weren't from there, people that were from all over the country, gangs that had like toys from China. It just didn't make sense of what I would think the county fair would be. So I'm trying to bridge the gap between what we have. I just went to Colonial Quarter this morning. It's a big cold tour. So what what we have that's downtown, you know, and what we have out here, and really bridge the gap. We have six bands coming. We're doing square dance. We're waiting for Reddy Tree. They're like pretty popular. I guess we have rides coming, like a whole bunch of stuff. Really trying to do the. But I'd love if you know you guys can get out there and give your save the farm speech.

CHRIS

Yeah, cool. Tommy Wilson will do it.

BRYAN

That's amazing.

So again, I just want to, you know, not really apologize for our last meeting, but just I loved your comment about moving forward. You know, and Commissioner Taylor, your comment- you want to keep us in business, right?

COMMISSIONER

Yes.

BRYAN

So, as you guys move forward in your negotiations from a county standpoint, it's imperative that you keep us in mind because we have actively been fighting against the land grant institution that's supposed to be helping us, and they are not helping us remain economically viable, and they have purposefully taken that language out. So they just want to keep us viable, and and that's worthless to me. And I do want to move forward 100% but I want to emphasize to y'all that this is a statewide problem. I think my problem is that I have a big mouth, and I'm not scared to open it. And there's frustrations with timber, with row crop, with citrus, with sod, across the board, and there is an option to move forward. And I think St. Johns County could be that beacon, right? That says, "Man, I want to do what they did because that's awesome. They have turned that ship around, and that's where I want to leave it.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you.

BRYAN 36:04

So, I just hope that y'all will please, please.

CHRIS

Yes, and as a whole, the county has really started to take notice back and start to pay attention to us. We have a voice now, which is wonderful. We appreciate that.

BRYAN

And please don't rush through it. I'm one voice. I'm begging you that this is something that needs to be worked through because it has not worked. My voice. I'm sorry.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you. We need your voice.

BILL

In keeping with your request to come up with good ideas moving forward, what the what would benefit the agricultural community, commercial agricultural community, and with what you said about reaching out to the local market, whether it's schools or restaurants or University of Florida itself, would it be helpful if there were a distribution center in St. Johns County that commercial production people could market their stuff through. So you had a it's kind of like the kind of like the greenery. I mean, if you if you've got you're going to raise 200 acres of green beans, you're going to put 10 acres or 20 acres through this distribution center that's managed by ideally you run it through the ag center, and people you would have you it would be would have to be it would be managed by St. John's County to benefit farmers, and you would sell to I mean there was a there was a proposal that was put forward at one point to do that, and it was part of the management plan for the the ag center was to have that distribution center. So you could sell when you sell citrus, or you can sell potatoes, or you could sell some of the farmers like the the Sykes are raising all kinds of stuff, and get them to commit a certain amount to that, and then have that be a distribution center. What I'm asking the commercial farmers: Do you think that would be useful? Is that something that you would participate in?

CARLETON

I think you're competing with Ben Wells. You got to be careful selling using the county to sell products that might be competing against other small other businesses, that's my biggest. And and also, I think that it could be such a small window. But I mean, just thinking competing against County Line, you're feeding in. So I buy a free market.

BILL

Yeah, other places are selling just a platform that would be something that would they they could sell through that also. I mean, they have their certain. They don't sell to the University of Florida. They don't sell to the public schools, St. Johns County Public Schools. I mean, there those are those are markets that are huge. No, the public schools not open for no. They are Cisco or...

BRYAN

Cisco will not even touch fresh produce.

BILL

But if the county ever does, it would be so much cheaper.

CARLETON

If the if the school board ever is interested in having those absolutely but then the main problem is the season tends to be a problem with restaurants as well.

JACKEE

We used to have a very small produce distribution company that sold two restaurants in town, and we would get a lot of stuff from Wesley Wells. We get a lot of stuff from what the girls were doing, all that different stuff. What happens with restaurants is they need carrots year round, and one person grows carrots here, and it's that. What works well is if you can fill in the gaps. Like I just picked up six cases of tomatoes yesterday, so you fill in the gaps with what's next, Tom? Green beans, green beans, right? So you fill in the gaps with green beans, but a lot of people are contracted, so you have to work it, but getting the restaurants on board to highlight the local item on the top of their dish is your best bet. I know you guys are your potatoes are at the Floridian. We used to do our work to them, but that's what Slow Food is kind of working with Barbara Golden to we're going to sit down and get these restaurant owners together. Say who wants to support local farms because just because they say they support local half the menus they we don't see them.

CHRIS

Yeah, well also we are seasonal.

JACKEE

Super seasonal. And here is a lot of monocropping. It is a lot of potatoes, a lot of green beans, so you can fill in with Ben Well's. Ben Wells has he goes to the Floridian directly, but we have done things like that in the past, and we would totally offer up our location because we fill in what they can't get. Nobody has tomatoes, but South Florida does. So you kind of have to get the restaurants on board to really want to do it.

BILL

I think bigger than just the restaurants. I think if you're a market, a market from Jacksonville, Daytona, Orlando, West somewhere. I mean, they're the market for fresh produce, and the other side of that also is a the canning side of it, and USDA abattoir, and all of those kinds of things, so that you could sell fresh beef or pork or chickens. I was in a grocery store in Gainesville called Wards, and they had rabbit. Never seen that. So those are things.

JACKEE

You run into like a lot of USDA things, though. Like we have to send all our pork off our chicken. We can only sell it as certain things. Like you run into a lot of because we don't have USDA processing facility. Yeah. So you run into a lot of like like, rabbit. I can only sell it as animals. I can't sell it for somebody.

BILL

Yeah, my point is that if the county wanted to promote to help commercial agriculture in St. John's County, those are the kinds of things that that the county has enough weight to put behind this. I mean, there have been efforts for decades to try to get a USDA approved processing facility here, so St. John's County can work on that, and it doesn't have to be a black, doesn't have to be a county owned facility that that that competes with County Line or Ben Wells or anybody else. I mean, they're just they're hitting a small part of the market that's available that would could expand commercial agriculture and market locally, and we saw the vulnerability of the market distribution system during COVID. And I mean,

there's no to be able to expand that market opportunity is, and I'm asking you. I'm not trying to tell anybody what to do, but the county itself-that's something that you could do.

BRYAN

The issue. I mean, food safety is is going to be brutal. The shipping of it, transportation is going to be A lot. Danny could probably speak way more than I ever could on repacking and selling. Right? I mean, how many facilities in our county do what you do throughout the year? And that's just potatoes.

DANNY

Two or three. Okay.

BRYAN

So you know, to have a facility like Danny's got, I mean, you're talking some bucks, right? I mean, with all the equipment you have, cooler. I don't know how that how that would work. I just don't know. I don't. I'm not in your world at all. We tried to do it before with giving back to food pantries in St. Johns County. St. Francis House was a big one that I pushed hard for because that's a transitional facility home. I don't know. Sorry, they wanted it packaged. They wanted it this. They wanted it that. It's like, man, I'm just, I'm just trying to help. Like, this is maddening from my standpoint.

CHRIS

Yeah, yeah. From your farm, it was very different. Danny, our facilities. Y'all have donated or whatever.

BRYAN

Yes.

CHRIS

It's only packaged.

BRYAN

That's right. For everybody else, and we don't have that. But we want to. I mean, Bill, I'll be honest with you. Like, if the county wanted to come in, you know, and say, Bryan, we want to buy 10 acres of your green beans, right? That's what you're. That was just a fun number. I'm just saying I want to buy them. I'm saying you're going to try to sell them through some platform. I was from Bryan's standpoint. I do not want to do anything to harm Ben or county line. I don't, but I would be willing to donate to...

BILL

That's not what I'm looking for.

BRYAN

Well, I know, but I think...

BILL

That's not my proposal. I'm not asking anybody to donate anything. I'm asking. I'm looking for ways for St. Johns County to expand the existing markets for local farmers to have a way to sell locally.

BRYAN

So the hard part about that is seed.

BILL

I'm not saying it's not.

BRYAN

Yeah, because it's, everything's contracted out.

BILL

So okay.

BRYAN

Yeah, I mean...

BILL

It's all all that stuff that's associated with farmers make it difficult. I'm saying that it's a missed opportunity. It's an opportunity that other areas have in place that we could replicate and benefit farmers if they wanted to participate in it. So that's and the county has the weight behind them. St. Johns County is a big player, and you could negotiate with farmers. We need a USDA processing facility. We need a canning facility. It's like the eggplant guys. I mean, they sold out of a great facility until it wasn't. I mean, those those kinds of processing facilities in St. John's County would benefit everybody.

DANNY

That's smaller. especially the smaller growers, we have a good opportunity here. Commercial guys, we got to do truck load volume. It's not really worth time to do it and to focus on it. But for the smaller folks getting started in things, the Ben Wellses, the Wesley Wellses, and County Line, that would be an opportunity for them in what better location, 16 to 95 there. So, Carleton, that's a good point you have too about competition with local smaller guys too. But overall, I think in a USDA facility, no individual grower can do that, but the county can do it and make it available to two folks. Canning facilities, sures a lot of potential there to kind of think of what how do we use the land of 16 and 95? You know, it was donated for agriculture. That'd be a good good focus on that.

BILL

That that was a master plan that was that county paid for 50 some 60 $1,000 to develop that master plan. Included those included those facilities, and it's not that you're

competing with Ben, Will, Wells, or with with County Mind. I'm the Glenn. I knew them when they first opened that thing, selling cabbage out of about.

JACKEE

I wouldn't actually think you're a competing leader.

BILL

I'm just saying I'm not. I wouldn't want to compete with them. What I would do is expand their markets so that they would. It's not just what they sold on the side of the road. You're putting it up, but you have you have. It's a. It's not a business. It's a platform for them to market that stuff. I mean, in the the school board. I mean, if you had if you had a processing facility, you could squeeze the the school board. Listen, I don't. We don't care about that company that's selling to you guys, and I mean, we're gonna. We want you to buy eggplant from us. You buy it all year long. We're gonna put it in your freezer. Eggplants. When eggplant is in mid season, we're gonna freeze the heck out of it. We want y'all to buy some, and you expand those markets. People are buying food, and the the guys like you that ship out truckloads and potatoes, and you got to get them out. You got to get them gone. Even Scott Parker, you're right. You're not. That's not for you. But the the Sykes, they how many crops? How many different crops did they raise 100, and each one of them comes in season, and each one of them goes out as they become. But your labor is always going to be a problem.

JENA

Is that something potentially? Could you task IFAS with that as a deliverable, maybe?

BILL

Yeah, I want to read you just. I know I'm not trying to dominate the conversation here, but I want to read you what IFAS is. What IFAS in University of Florida are required by statute to to provide. Land grant universities must teach agriculture, science, military tactics, and engineering alongside classic studies. They are required to maintain public access, run agricultural experiment stations, manage cooperative extension programs and secure matching funds, state funds to qualify for ongoing federal support. And goes on to say, the

University of Florida receives millions of dollars annually in federal formula funds and competitive grants through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agricultural Science, such as the Hatch Act Smith Liver allocations, and it goes on to say that 2025. Let's see, the University of Florida does not receive a single isolated by item allocation labeled specifically as land grant funding for a static annual amount. Instead, it's land grant commission through the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, supported by a blend of federal formula funds, matching state appropriations and grants for the 2025 fiscal year UF IPAS alone recorded 286.5 million in total research spending, backed by a broader record 1.33 billion in total university research expenditures, and over 39 million raised specifically in private and advanced support for its land grant operations. They're required by statute to have extension, and we're not required for it. And so those are yes to answer your question. Those are things that IFAS should be developing and promoting throughout the state, not just in St. Johns County, to help farmers continue to be viable. And it's something that we could request. We want you to do this because there's a big market out there, and we should be having to be. I don't want to compete with County Lund, and I don't want Kelly Monta to compete with Mexico. So I mean, we have a big market here, and we're not tapping into it, and we need to figure out how to make that happen. So you guys can stay in business, and the farm communities continue to contribute to the culture and the economy and the lifestyle that we've had here since a long time ago.

CHRISTINE

So, Bill, you mentioned that there's other counties that have the distribution platforms you're talking about. We can we can look at that.

BRYAN

Hillsborough does. And is Sarasota? What's Sarasota County?

CHRISTINE

Sarasota.

BRYAN

I know that because my uncle does a lot.

CARLETON

But so I have two things. One is a follow-up to the the list growers that are interested in selling, selling public or list of growers combined they sell in time to year. Those are the things, and then the risk of stepping back into that thing. I was not at the last meeting, so maybe it was already discussed. But I think one thing to ask them (IFAS), maybe that's what you're talking about, or their plan or whatever, which is if they have specific ideas or things that they're targeting to accomplish or goals to specifically on the on the production side, just to see what their thoughts are, see if they have any ideas. It's easy to you know they don't do anything for us. Let them tell us what they're what they think they're doing for us or what their their plan is. That's fair to ask.

CHRISTINE

Yes, and that is part of the contract where they would provide us a handle. So tell us what they plan to do for the next year, and we can certainly have communication.

CARELTON

Well, they need to tell us before you read a contract. Not us. They need to tell y'all before they before you sign after you sign a contract. After you sign it, it doesn't matter what they say.

KEALEY

The plan would be part of the contract, and so then we would bring that back. And so that plan, obviously, you know, it's a work in progress with regard to that. So that plan would then come back, and so it's it's part of the contract, but it would be designed and implemented through the contract. So usually, when you have a contract like this, the first 60 days is give us the plan, and we can provide feedback on that plan. So it's not a done deal at that part. It's it's still a collaborative effort to get something what you're talking about.

CARLETON

And that way, at the end of the year, especially from year to year, which there's always there, you know, but you can look back and assess how they did in five years. I don't remember what happened two months ago. So five years ago, you forget it all.

BRYAN

Before we jump to public comment, just real quick, I wanted to say that I really appreciated Dan's email that he sent to us. I just thought that was nice. I did have a question, if you received anything from Tim in terms of our last meeting, he had mentioned that he would send you his correspondence with Dan or with the county about the ag center.

PRISSY

No, not yet.

BRYAN

Okay, sorry. but I did want to tell Dan if you could pass that along, please.

AMY

I have a question. So I just want to. I'm curious. Is this a farming committee or ag committee? Ag committee. So if it's an ag committee, why on this board, or you're all farmers, or you work for a farm, why is there not representation of other things that are ag? Because ag isn't just row crops, correct? Okay, because there's not a 4-H representation, there's not a master gardener representation, there's not a hoard representation, there's not a horse council representation, there's not a timber grower, and there's not anybody from livestock. I'm sure I'm missing some other parts of ag. So if this is a true ag committee, why is not all of ag represented? Because to me, I feel like this committee is being used as a retaliation against IFAS, because that's all that has been said. I mean, besides your other things, but if only the ag row is commenting, how can these other members of AG don't get a say? How come the timber growers aren't getting a sit? How come the horse council isn't getting a say? How come a master gardener isn't getting a say? How come a forager isn't getting a say?

CHRISTINE

So Amy, what I can share with you is that the ordinance that created this committee talks about what type seven member board and talks about looking at folks who have owned or operated a commercial farm for the past five years or more within Northeast Florida has experience in a whole list of...

AMY

correct so that's like

CHRISTINE

Let me finish, please. So what I can tell you is the process was the county advertised for people meeting this criteria who would be interested in serving on this advisory board. Then applications were submitted, and I think only seven applications were submitted, and so then the board of county commissioners reviews that and makes the appointment. So that's how this board got to be.

AMY

I mean, it's very convenient that only seven applied and these seven were chosen. It's just, it is very.

JACKEE

I'm not a. I'm not a row croper.

AMY

I know exactly. So you're not a row crop.

JACKEE

I actually represent, like...

AMY

But you don't meet the criteria. So how is she on it if she doesn't meet the criteria?

JACKEE

I do make them. I'm not a row crop farmer. I raise chickens. I raise pigs. I make animal feed. I would say that my business is a huge supporter of ag, and we've brought numerous people out to the area that they're and myself are very concerned about. So and what we're talking about.

AMY

So, so this committee again, it's like a farming committee. Should be a farming thing on the ag committee because y'all are not going to welcome in horse. You're not going to welcome in timber. You're not going to welcome in 4-Hers, and you're not going to welcome in.

BRYAN

I'm going to go ahead and hit pause right there. Number one, there has never been an agenda for retaliation to anybody or any organization. There has been opportunity to speak up about frustrations that the ag community has had. Yes, in timber. Yes, in 4-H. Yes, with master gardeners. Yes, with commercial growers. Everybody. So that's one option that we've had. The the other option, Amy, is that in three years, two two years, three years, it's going to be opened up for a new round.

AMY

Yeah, but when did they have they got a chance to talk?

BILL

I want to say something.

BRYAN

Yeah, they can come just like you've come tonight.

GREG

Yeah, but trying to find this on the calendar is bullshit. You've got to search to find it.

KEALEY

Time out for one second. Sir.

GREG

Okay, but to find this is ridiculous.

KEALEY

Understood, and we can make that better. Right now, we're in public comment. I apologize. I don't know your last name, so I hate referring to you as sir. But she had the floor, and so when we do public comment...

GREG

We're just trying to...

KEALEY

I understand, sir. I understand your frustration. So you know, we do three minutes of public comment, and we get that. We understand the frustrations. This board has only met four times. It is a new board, so they are a work in progress, and we are working towards having this represent the community. And so we understand there's a lot of frustration, but we want to keep it civil. We want to keep our voices at a nice level because I think you know they're growing. I work with a lot of boards and commissions, and when these committees

and boards are new, there is this level of frustration. So we understand and we hear you. I think what Bryan's trying to say is that they're always open for people in the public. There's always a reach out to Prissy if there's a concern for the committee, and this is an advisory committee, and so you know they are sitting here to provide liaisons between this community and the BOCs.

AMY

Right. Well, I mean, I know you weren't at the last meeting, but we listened to Brian beat his fist 50 times. If that's not retaliation, I don't know what it is.

BILL

I just want to explain about the University of Florida and its mission as a land grant college. And what you've got is there's there are three to be part of ICU. There's three focus foci. One is practical education. That's extension experiments stations, and then information sharing. And the information sharing is like the master gardeners. It's 4-H. It's a whole different division from commercial ag, which is, and that's a that's part of the mission of University of Florida. But it's not the commercial agriculture focus. They have more than one. They have three focuses, and the commercial ag is what this this committee was for to adopt.

AMY

Well, then you should call it commercial ag.

BILL

It's an agricultural advisory committee. I mean, it's pretty clear what what the intention was, and it's open to the public, and if it wasn't advertised good enough, then I mean that's something that's easily fixed, and the nobody is trying to. I mean, I've reached out to a bunch of farmers and a bunch of different people to try to get them to come to these.

AMY

So maybe all the farmers don't agree with Brian. I know he said he's the voice of all farmers. Why are all the farmers aren't here?

BRYAN

I've never said that I'm the voice of all farmers. I've always said I am a voice.

ERIN

I would just like to offer that you can sign up for their email. I got the email and the agenda, so you can sign up. I got it from Wayne Larson, and that's how I found out about the meeting, twice. And the newsletter. I'm signed up for that as well.

KEALEY

But we can certainly put that on the website so it's accessible.

ERIN

And I can I also offer that I've also heard you mention several times that you are one voice, not the voice of the farmers. So, I was at the last meeting too, and I recorded it.

JULIA

I heard one of you say that 4-H could function with many fewer staff. I'd like to explain to you what 4-H does. We are an educational program. Commissioner Taylor, you've judged contests for us. You're very familiar with some of the things we do and the success we have with young people. Each year, we serve between 4007 1000 youth in this county through clubs, schools, public and private, and community groups. Our volunteers lead the clubs, and there's between 20 and 25 clubs per year serving over 300 students. Now, 300 is less than 1% of the 4,000. Okay, the volunteers lead the clubs. The staff and faculty run the other 99 percent. And if you cut us and say that we're overpaid or we're too large, then what you're saying is that other 99% is not important. And oh, we manage the volunteers too, and make sure they are screened, level two background screened. We make sure they are trained. We follow risk management policies with them and procedures, and we educate them on how to be better volunteers. That's what we do. So, I really hope that it is not the

perception of this board that 4-H is too fat because to serve young people, which is what we do all over the county. That's what we do, and just so that you understand this, without the USDA, we don't exist. We're USDA program through NIFA specifically, and so it can't exist if we don't work with the USDA and NIFA. That's how we're funded, okay? And any money that we spend, spend. whether it's office supplies or travel, that all comes through donations and money that we come up with from fundraising things we do, we don't get money for anything, 4-H, anything but partial salaries from the county. County doesn't buy office supplies. County does not pay for any of the clubs. County does not buy the materials, and that's fine. I have no problem with that, not at all. We're making it just fine, but I really feel badly about the fact that we're perceived the way we are, and I apologize for not communicating that to you better, so that you understand we're not a bloated bunch of people that are not educating people, not educating youth, and we do do agricultural programming. For the last several years, 10 plus years, we've had programs out of the Hastings farms, which were funded by BOCC. Now, for a myriad of reasons, we're not doing it this year, but we have over the last 10 to 12 years. So we are bringing it to our kids. We are bringing agriculture, production agriculture, not production. Sorry, crops. We are, and the reason we don't have a lot of ag clubs, we don't have any leaders to do it? We need volunteers, and the volunteers need to be someones like you who are experts in those areas. I can't go out and teach kids about crops. Can't. I'm not qualified. I know I'm running out of time. I'm sorry. Sorry.

BRYAN

I have never, I've never heard anything negative about 4-H. This group, especially, I think everybody in this room loves our youth. I, I mean, I've honestly never heard anything negative about 4-H. To sit there and say that you feel like you're bloated, I think...

JULIA

No, that was what was said. That what was said that 4-H could be slimmer.

BRYAN

I don't know of anybody that has said that.

JULIA

Someone said something to that effect.

CARLETON

I think you might because based on the scoffs I got when I was talking. If I said that, that was not my point. My point to you, we, or I, recognize that there are lots of other portions of IFAS. The specific part that, that we are making an exception to, is everything dealing with that portion of the IFAS budget that goes to the commercial ag has nothing to do with...

JULIA

But we're all extension, and if you're talking about cutting the extension budget, you're talking about cutting us.

BRYAN

We are not talking about cutting...

JULIA

No, but it's all one big package. It's one big thing. If you're saying we need to cut, and we're paying 80% is what you you said. That I know I heard. Okay, fair enough. You are. not arguing that. I just wante you to understand that we are a part of a big organization. We can't say, we want nothing to do with one part of Extension. Whatever volunteer program there is can't exist without Extension. 4-H can't. Master gardeners can't. All all the different program areas.

BRYAN

I don't think there's anybody that argues against 4-H at all, ever. I've never heard anybody say anything negative about it. I just I I wish 4-H was 10 times what it is. I think that our youth represented in St. Johns County is is horrible. I really do. I wish? I mean, for 1015, years, I've been a huge proponent of putting gardens in schools and advocating for FFA and 4-H in any way that I can. I'm only one person, right? I don't own anything, right? I'm just a citizen of St. Johns County. County. But any chance that I get I am trying to promote the youth.

JULIA

Bryan, be a club leader.

BRYAN

I mean...

JULIA

that would be great.

BRYAN

No, I'm with you 100. But I want you to hear loud and clear that, like, Bryan has no authority to sit there and go, "That's cut. I am a voice, one right, and I'm voicing my frustration that I've had with the University of Florida that has billions of dollars. Right, so my frustration is moving forward. How do we change what's been happening for the last 40 or 50 years? Right, so I want to move forward. I do 100% but I want you to know that no matter what happens, I Bryan is going to fight as hard as he can so that 4-H has every opportunity that they've had in the past, right? And maybe we can figure out more.

JULIA

That would be terrific.

BRYAN

Oh yeah, no, I think...

JULIA

I would appreciate that support.

BRYAN

Oh my gosh, absolutely. We got it. What we're trying to figure out, at least from Brian's standpoint, is how do we get a relationship back with UF because it has been destroyed, and then it then they you know want to be our best friends and they build it back up a little bit just to rip the road right off from underneath us again. So the frustration is from commercial ag, right? From Bryan's standpoint, from doing the same trials over and over and over and over, Danny's done it way longer than I have, but...

JULIA

So you don't have an issue with extension as a whole?

BRYAN

Say that one more time.

JULIA

So you don't have a problem with extension as a whole?

JULIA

because that's a total package.

JACKEE

I think we wish was more 4H, and I would love to invite you come to the mill, drop stuff off. All of my customers who come in, they have animals, they have horses, they have chickens, they have kids. They want a garden. These kids come to me wanting to do something, instead they said they feed my goats. They want it. If you come, bring me stuff. I will put it on our social media. We bring World Golf Village, Trail Mark. Absolutely, we are very open to working with everyone. I think everyone here knows that. Just because they're farming potatoes and they're farming potatoes, we still want to work together to keep what they've been doing out there and what we're doing. And there's this new side of agritourism. Some people want to be a part of it. Some don't. That's my business, and that's what I'm in.

I run a store where you bring people there. But please, I get customers who ask about 4-H all the time, and a lot of the responses that they don't they don't hear back, they don't get. There's not a lot of. I do know two people who run 4-H clubs. I don't know if they're doing it this year. I know one of my customers is starting a new one, Minnie Barnyard. Gretchen did the Rebel Rider team. I don't know if she's doing it this year. She is okay. Good. But yeah, I mean, come on.

JULIA

And you're bringing up a good point. There's only three of us, and so if we can't get volunteers. That's our big pitch. We need volunteers. Yes, ma'am. Well,

CHRIS

How come we don't hear from you guys for 4-H? All these farms. don't have you ever? No one's ever reached out.

JULIA

Bryan's heard of us.

I've heard of you, but Bryan, we've worked with you before.

BRYAN

Yeah, but I don't know what your volunteer needs are.

JULIA

Oh my gosh!

BRYAN

Yeah, that's what that's what you're saying.

CHRIS

That's the thing right there. The communication issue. There's the lack of communication right there.

JULIA

That's awesome. But that's good. That's what I know.

BRYAN

Absolutely, but even in our meeting, our last meeting, you know, I'm I'm huge for trying to push for ag back in schools because there's there's one high school that does it. You know, and it's it is it's an absolute travesty. But elementary, middle, I want kids to be excited about ag culture. Get your hands dirty. Like, I mean, hello, we pushed for too long to go into technology, right? Well, how is that fair now? Pretty crappy for all those people, right? But all the trade work, hey, we're still grinding away, you know, and that's I push for ag in school as best I can. But you gotta have champions of ag.

CHRIS

And that's the thing. If we learn anything about this committee, it's communication. It's the lack of communication between IFAS and the agricultural community. Maybe in some areas it gets more attention than the other, but no one's ever reached out to us about 4-H or anything like that.

BILL

So my recommendation, my comment is to the county and the county, the extension service at this point is being managed by the University of Florida. So the complaints that you have about how things have been handled, and you're worried about a budget cut and all the rest. Those should be directed at the University of Florida because all the employees of the Extension Service work for the University of Florida. St. Johns County just pays for it, and so that's part of the the that's part of the frustration is that the employees of the extension service-they don't answer to St. Johns County or the St. Johns County farmers. They answer to the University of Florida. So my recommendation to the county is to take that take that role back and have the employees of the Extension Service work for St. Johns

County. So then, if you have concerns with with 4-H or the master gardeners and all the rest, 4-H is one of the best programs of all times. You've changed the trajectory of kids' lives for generations and sent them in the right direction. So St. Johns County should hear that. I mean, they, they, they. But you're not answering to St. Johns County at this point. You're answering to University of Florida. So my suggestion is, we need to get it. We're paying for it already. We might as well take control of that, and that way we're more responsive to the people who the Extension Service and Ag Center is supposed to represent and does it because they don't work for us. They're working for the university. And I went to the University of Florida, and I've got a degree in agriculture, and I've been involved in farming since I was a kid, including plant potatoes and Hastings when you know right out of college...

JULIA

I need to sit down. I'm sorry.

BILL

They need to work. The extension service needs to work for St. John's County, not for the university. So that's it's important that we retake control of those employees. those employees.

JULIA

And let me say that we, our department, is beholden to the kids, the parents, the teachers that we work with, and our volunteers. We have to work with the UF guidelines, but those are the four groups that I'm most worried about. That that's what I focus on. Okay, there are things we have to do. They're bureaucratic, absolutely, nobody likes bureaucratic stuff. But the focus for us is people. And Bill, you've been to interviews. You've been to these group interviews. You've seen all these candidates. and I just want to make sure. And now I know that I could come to you and bring you information.

CHRIS

Absolutely.

JULIA

and if you could talk to people about becoming a volunteer or put them in contact with you.

CHRIS

I'm the biggest advocate for any volunteer in agriculture. I'll do anything to help this industry. So whatever you need, you come and ask me. I will help you with that.

JULIA

I will absolutely do that. Thank you.

KEALEY

Through the chair, if I address that very briefly, because we've heard that a couple times about the the relationship with the employees, and so by statute, extension agents are will always remain employees of UF. It's a statutory requirement. The county doesn't have that option. The county can. can, some counties do provide support staff here and there. We don't do that, but the statute specifically states that extension agents are employees of university.

BILL

But not the director?

KEALEY

And the director.

BILL

Is that there are other counties in Florida that have extension staff that that works for the county and not for the University of Florida?

KEALEY

Support staff, so like secretarial administrator.

BILL

But none of the program directors?

KEALEY

No.

BILL

None in the whole state of Florida? None of them work for counties?

KEALEY

Not by the statute. I can only tell you what the statute says that the extension agents and the director are employees that do that.

BILL

Can you send us this the committee that statute?

KEALEY

Sure.

BILL

I'd like to see that.

PRISSY

I think what you're saying, Bill, in some counties, yeah, you're UF IFAS Extension. You're a UF employee, but you're also paid by the county. So you're like a part-time county employee. That's how it was when I was in Putnam. We were paid by both. So I think that's the point. Yeah, extension. You are UF, but you still get part of your salary from the County. You're considered staff because when I was in Putnam County, we were staff and UF employees. I think that's what you're trying to say?

BILL

No, what I was trying to say is that I think that the extension staff should work for St. Johns County and not the University of Florida. That's what I was saying. And you're saying that that's not legal, and I would like to see that. So, I mean, that's what I meant.

BRYAN

Have we ever had county like true county extension, county services? I mean, was that any that happened a long time, or I don't even know. I'm not sure. Yeah, I was just curious.

BILL

I thought the MOU that the County put together changed who the employees worked for.

CHRISTINE

Yes, it did. That's what happened.

BILL

So that was 10 years ago.

AMY

But it was like what Prissy said, it was 50-50.

BILL

Before that, employees worked for St. John's County, not UF.

AMY

But not extension agents.

DANNY

Be a good time to kind of figure it out. We're working on MOU contracts, so this would be a good time to bring it up and make it to be addendum to override statute or.

BILL

It wasn't that way. So that's the point. But just for your information, it wasn't always that.

KEALEY

Correct. There was a statutory change that was made.

BILL

So how do those change?

KEALEY

Legislature. Oh, it's a state level matter.

BILL

Oh, okay, okay, okay, I got it.

DANNY

I've got one thing to say. I'm 4-H. I'm a product 4-H out of my 10-year older. My sister's 10 years older. I am. I was her project. She got a yellow ribbon under some such thing. She's one of our volunteers. But to me, 4-H is very important to us. Motto for my farm, I was looking for one for a long time to make the best of it. I mean, what better motto to have for kids or for farms or whatever? So, 4-H. I don't think anybody's out to get 4-H by any means. There's a lot of support in the county. county. Anything we can do to help, like Chris and Bryan or others, just maybe some interaction better with the ag community would be good. My understanding why this council formed originally was row crop ag is under attack. Do I want to keep farming, or do I want to don't headaches? I had a flood of hair last year. Do I want to keep doing what I'm doing? I love farming. I want to keep doing it. it. But we need help. We need to. How do you keep farmers farming? Keep us profiting. That's what we got to do. It might be small steps or whatever, but whatever we can do, it's real easy to have a land developer come in and pay off the die. I've had enough. And older you get, closer at that. More tempting it is. But to me, I love what I do. I know the family farms area love what we're doing. We want to have the ability to keep doing it, but financially, it's got to be worth our while I'm doing because it's a lot of aggravation. Working with the university part all my life, and that's that's been the biggest challenge we've had. But they, the BMPs and things, they have a different focus.

And the problem with the university I've seen has been the top-down governments. Local people have always done pretty well with us. We have the same. with them, but the bureaucracy over there, and there's a lot of politics in UF too, which we get rid of a lot of that. But so there's a lot of potential for that's the reason communion was was done was not give somebody a lot of power or anything, but it's supposed to be representative of the ag community. We do need a commercial. We have North Florida Growers Exchange. We really need to get that going again. Be strictly representative of commercial ag, and that committee. The big thing was to be a voice for everybody in ag, so you can voice a thing and everybody else aware and open us with meetings and things. What's going on in the county? My request to the University of Florida has always been keep us aware of what's coming down the pipeline. If it's good or bad, let us know what's coming so we can be prepared for it. They need to be communication clearinghouse, and that's been one of the challenges. I've got a lot of ways to fix it. You're supposed to come with solutions, but so that's why I appreciate Bill and the people serving on committee here because Bill's not a root crop ag guy by any means, but we have a lot of very similar things, and he's fought passionately for commercial ag in here. So I appreciate the committee and what we're trying to do here.

CHRIS

I just want to say something, and this is my voice with this new ag enclave law that's coming in, we're going to be losing a lot of farmers that's coming, Putnam County, St. Johns County, and we're all trying to hang on. And we're not here to to do anything to get rid of you. We just need some help from the county, from IFAS, from the government, from everybody. We're about you guys. We're about to lose a lot of farms. It's coming, and there's a lot for sale right there. Just keep that in mind. We're just trying to do our jobs, feed you guys, and you know, get along here.

DANNY

Christine, is it losing farmers or gaining 1000s of neighbors.

CHRIS

Yeah, right. A million dollars,

BRYAN

Danny. Danny, I just want to piggyback on your comment there. One of the big frustrations that I've had is when problems have come up that were no longer recommendations, but became law. I didn't hear anything from the university, and that was that was so disheartening, to be honest with you, because there was no heads up, and they knew what they were doing. And so I just want to piggyback on your communication.

MARYANN

In the beginning, I heard some very negative comments about how you don't feel that the county should be funding the positions because it's too expensive. You're feeling that you have should be funding, and then it turned around somewhere towards the end of the meeting that you felt it should be funded. Did you become employees? That to me sounds like 100% funding. So I'm not sure where the disconnect happened from going from we don't feel that we should be funding it to we want them to be county employees for accountability?

BRYAN

1,000,000% accountability. So when we when we present things to our CED or to the research farm, I had an Extension farm. Sorry, not the research farm. It's almost like it stops there, and it doesn't climb up. So, you're asking why and we doing this again, until we are blue in the face, telling why are we doing this again and again and again and again? You know you guys are now making laws that we have to obey. That's I mean that's the short end of the stick. So the accountability of the land grant institution to be for agriculture instead of against agriculture is the big ticket item. So there's there's a lot of issues. There's a lot of problems don't climb uphill. And to Danny's point, the politics that are over there, it's unbelievable. It's it's it's unbelievable. So the true issues that are statewide aren't getting addressed because it's not on their agenda. This is the way that I see it.

MARYANN

Well, I will tell you, I'm all about extension, and I know you have addressed for each as three different groups. We've also talked about the Master Gardeners. I'm president of the Master Gardeners, and I want you to know that we are 108 volunteers strong. We have provided just pulled some information this afternoon from January 1st to now. We've provided 7,922 hours contact hours in residence. That's emails, face-to-face contact going out to residents' our ages. Having people log in, doing soil testing, free soil tests, we contact people. We talk to them about the results. What does that mean for their chart, for their flowers, for their plants, for their trees. We people bring in bugs to us. We try and identify different insects to help them understand what's attacking their plant and how to fight against it. Basically, we identify diseases. We identify why is a germline growing. What might might happen? What might be happening? How do you know change the practices of what you were doing, we work with youth. We've worked with 4-H in conjunction with them at eight different times. We do camps with them. We also have been out at the ag adventures, the fairgrounds every year. We go to that. We do the tri county potato. We say, well, you do potatoes. Yeah, potatoes. We've done that with the farmers, and so we're involved in that. We're involved in the schools. Part of the problem, I will tell you, are the principals. We're right now involved in five elementary schools. I can tell you who they are. Okay, they are that I have written down somewhere in here. I know Crookshank is one, Sebastian is one, Patriot Oaks, South Woods, and let's see the other one. Okay, so but there are five elementary schools in which we're involved. I personally, when I was a teacher in St. Johns County, I was at Cosette Bay. I had a garden, one of the first ones, and

Master Gardener came to help me. I reached out to them. They came and worked with me, developing a garden for the students. I was the only person interested in doing that. I was a science teacher, and so I was very interested. The kids loved it. They had a great time, but the principals weren't really happy about having it. So I continued. It was okay. The kids. And of course, what happened was during that time we had. I don't know if you recall. I don't even know if they still do it. They would shut down the schools during the summer because the kids wouldn't continue during the summer. Well, we have the fences around it. They're locked. Kids can't get in, so that kind of squashed that program. But a lot of the principals don't want us on the property. A lot of principals make it difficult for the master gardeners to come and work because, for instance, I have I grow some plants for that, so I have a lot of vegetable plants at my house ready to go to the schools. Schools are they're supposed to go in next week, or actually they were supposed to go in this Thursday. The people in charge, the master department in charge, just got notification that the kids are testing, not allowed for the property, so they can't even go in and do anything, even though they're not making any noise. So. We didn't know them until after the fact we bought and rescued them and used them. We're back at Southwest here, and everything's real happy because they're the principal. Everything's going along just very well. But but a lot of things we do work at CLAs. I personally volunteer at CLAs. I've done that for a number of years. We're in libraries. We give talks. We give out plants. We give out seeds. We actually donate to the seed bank. We set up two larges more recently. We set up $100 downtown.

CHRIS

I just want you to be mindful of time.

MARYANN

We have a medical food pantry. We go away 2000 trees apart a day, and and when we are working with children.

GREG

To address part of last month's meeting. Bill brought up a comment that sounded like the most embarrassing to Tim, ask him a simple question: When was the knowledge at University of Florida Tim and Amy knew about the land change there at the Ag Center? That was very simple. I called the EOC. They told me it was April 3, 2023. The Usina family came in and signed it. We didn't know it. I was the act or the county forester at the time. Don't

know anything. All this again, coming back to the county. You know, y'all sounding really good. That hey, we're the county. Yep, yep, yep. All this other good stuff. I'll go back to the county and ask them why is there now an EOC or 911 building out there on land that's supposed to be strictly ag. 2008, Charlie Usina came back and refreshed his trust on that property where it's ag only. Now it says. up where you got a 911 building out there or a 911 building. You now have the big signs for the fire department taking over to 20 acres. So you're telling me all this stuff to the counties, yip yip yip, and all this good stuff. Now go one step further. You're saying all this good stuff about the 4-Her. Yeah, they're great. We want to keep them. What happened to the wind mitigation building? It is no longer open to the 4-Hers. It has now been dubbed over to the fire department. They had to go to the fire department and ask their permission to use that. So five or six groups, if I'm not mistaken, now I'll have the capability going without jumping hoops to get to it. So again, you know, you keep saying all this a lot. I see in the county I'm coming from a different direction, and all these other people. The county needs to step up too, in my opinion. We keep saying all these other good things. I keep hearing, you know, okay, what are we going to do with this? We we've lost the property to development coming in for the fire department. When that was told to Tim and me at the same time, but when they went to the meeting the next day, they already had $7 million budgeted for the fire department. So don't tell me this has not been something that just popped up. So we need to look at you know hey let's look at the big picture and stuff like this. I'm all over for the commercial ag. We need you. I don't want any more houses either. I used to be a county forester. I know the timber around here. Boom, man. Timber ain't nothing. We don't see anybody at the table here. That's where I'm pissed off because we don't have the representation of the ag lands here. We have commercial ag. I'll go to what Amy said. This is commercial ag only for the row crops. We're trying to get conservation easement. Hey, I'm a total believer in that. But you're not representing everybody. All you're trying to represent, my opinion, is just a commercial ag. Do you need it? Heck yeah! I am not going to deny that. I know y'all are faced with stupid prices from the developers. It would not be very hard to say, "Hey, here's my land deed gone. I'm done with all this. You try and get the younger crowd coming into it; it's harder and harder. You're fighting Mother Nature, and Mother Nature last year kicked our butts without the rain and forestry aspect. That put me behind on my burning that put me behind on my planting trees, so I'm affected by that also. You had the ag exempt that comes in. That is a great thing. If it weren't for that, all this land would be developed. I appreciate that.

BRYAN

That's your time's up on that. We do have a great representation. I feel like we really do. Bill, thank you, Jackee, for coming here.

CHRIS

I also want to say that real problem is not insignificant. The economic impact it has in this county, the economic impact it has in the country. I mean, we do deserve communication and accountability. I don't.

GREG

Timber is the number one ag business in Florida, so don't you know? And again, I don't have a problem with it. Have one too, but where are you going to have another person on there? I'd love to, but I didn't know about it until this meeting last month.

CHRIS

This is a volunteer job. It's volunteer jobs, man.

GREG

Y'all should be paid for the abuse that you get. Yeah.

BRYAN

So volunteers are needed everywhere, and that's the problem. It's 10% that does 90 of it, right? I mean, it's just the way it is.

GREG

And that's the 4h. They know all about that.

CHRIS

Exactly, they need more volunteers. We're going to need volunteers for this group here because in two years or whatever, you know. Thank you.

MARYANN

I just wanted to thank you for coming up with an idea that I think the committee should be coming up with. That's your purpose is to see how you can progress and move forward. And I'm not. That was the first one. I think we're shot down quite a few times, but I hope you keep going ahead and not give it up because that's the focus of how can we happen to get that group between the agricultural and icebergs or whatever group you want to work with, how can we move it forward instead of staying stagnant? We have so many hundreds of 1000s of homes in this county, and we're coming all the time that we need to expand. We just can't stay on our little spot right here. We need to figure out something. So I want to. I know there's there were some bad hard feelings.

BILL

And about the fact that this committee only represented commercial ag and silviculture is fundamentally part of the agricultural community in the state of Florida. I mean, they they enjoy the agricultural tax exemption just like row crops or all the rest of it. So they're part of ag. When I was a kid in St. Johns County, we're probably between 20 25,000 people lived in the whole county. 15,000 live downtown St. Augustine. It's been built out for 100 years. 10,000 people in the whole of St. Johns County, and it was all ag land. It was all that's what it was. It defined what St. Johns County was as ag, and over the years, that has you know what has happened, and so the purpose of this committee was to try to somehow figure out how to save farmers who have defined what St. Johns County is for all this time from selling out, selling out, and moving, being frustrated and being beat up. So the the county has agreed to form a committee. The purpose of the committee was to hear from farmers, including pine tree growers. They're just like everybody else. To hear from them, what do we need to do? The county is reaching out, asking, what can we do as the county commission and county staff to help preserve, protect, make farmers viable in St. John's County? So that's thank you for for that. I mean, and I'm I'm volunteering because it's important. It's important to say what little bit we have left, and so there's, and that does not disparage master gardeners. We've Southern Horticultures work for master gardeners from longer than you've been involved. I promise you that. And the same thing with 4-H. Doesn't have any more. There's nobody discounting the importance of 4-H or the county staff, the staff at the ag center. Nobody's being disrespected, but the purpose of this committee was the

county's response to requests for help from the agricultural community. Help us stay in business because we provide a ton of goods and services in St. Johns County, and we feel like we've been overlooked, and we need some help, and so that-that's the purpose of this. This, these people that sit at this table, that's their focus: commercial ag and the extension service and IFAS and all the rest of it. It's all bound up together. I mean, and nobody, nobody on this committee is suggesting that we cut the budget. I mean, we're already paying for it. I think those programs are important. I just, as you well know, there's a lot of frustration about how they were managed. That's the problem, not the funding. We all think that it's worthwhile and pay for all that. It's just how it's been managed over the last period of time, and how what can we do to make it better. That's the purpose of this committee.

MRS DUNN

So, so how is the? Yes, I'm his wife, but I I work for a living, so he does the farming stuff. I'm a banker, so you know every chickens. But so up until me just hearing about this meeting from friends and people I kind of know, I really didn't see nothing like on Facebook other than joining, so everybody in the county should really just join the website, pay attention that way. Or are y'all advertising like on the news or on anything, any public like signs going out or anything like that? Because I mean, this is like I've never been out here, and I lived here for 20-something years, so I don't think I've ever been to a meeting in this place. So finding it, if I were coming by myself, would be able to find it. Why couldn't we have this like at the Ag Center since we're talking about the Ag Center? And what's going to happen to the Ag Center if the contract doesn't go through? Are y'all going to just turn it into something else? Because they have a community garden out there, not just the Master Garden, but there is a community garden out there, so schools aren't letting in there. People can go out there and teach their kids how to grow stuff, but if that's all going to be like you got the sheriff's department, you got the fire department. We have a fire department right down the road. I mean, what's going to happen with that? Just me looking at. I go there and walk around just because it's a beautiful property at the end. I pay my county taxes and all that stuff. You know, I like to go there and just walk around and see all the beauty of it. Is that going to be taken from that area and making it like more of a commercial area, and everything move out towards Hastings? That's a county. That's a county answer.

BRYAN

But we've we've had meetings all over the county.

MRS DUNN

Oh no! But I've never seen anything. I've never seen like any post.

BRYAN

I mean, that's that's a county issue. They post their meetings publicly for anybody. There's 1000 meetings that I've never even heard of.

MRS DUNN

So nobody's advocating saying, "Hey, we're having this meeting just like you're going to now."

KEALEY

We are on social media, its posted on the website.

MRS DUNN

I have to join your sites, though.

KEALEY

No, no, they're just public sites. You don't have to join a site. It's just a public county website. There is a newsletter. I think there's a sign-up in the newsletter. We'll make that information available.

PRISSY

And as far as the locations, I can say we had discussed early on in our organizational meeting that we were going to rotate to expose all of us to different county facilities throughout the county, and also for fairness because we have bay members that are on the island and they're on the west side of the county. So we're just trying to be fair and accommodating of everyone, but also several people here today. This is our first time having a meeting here and the first time ever for some.

CHRIS

I've never been here.

BRYAN

I've never been here.

MARIA

I'm excited that you guys are here and show the county that the equestrians are here. So there's always like it just buried my feelings that we have a huge county and there's only a lot of us here and a lot of them who are directly involved.

MRS DUNN

Where I just had a doctor's appointment, so I was like, "Hey, I'm going to go and visit this. That's everything. I'm really not impressed with the turnout of something so important, whether it be commercial, whether it be trees, whether it be chickens, whatever. You know, I'm upset we don't have an FFA. I'm upset we don't have the county fair every year that when I moved here a long, long time ago, had I'm upset about a lot of that, but I just I'm upset mostly because of the turnout here today, and I'm just thinking that it's not out there enough. Like I'm not going to go to St. John's. I have to go every day just to see if there's going to be a meeting.

JACKEE

Every every advisory committee meeting is posted on there, and I would just say we actually don't get to make any final decisions, right? We're just giving our opinions as all different people involved in many different aspects of agriculture through St. John's County. So we're just saying, hey, and we may have some very different ideas about how things should work, but we're also talking about all this stuff for the first time together in this room, in front of an audience of people. So, but we don't get a final decision. We don't say, "Oh, we are getting rid of IPHS. Get them out of here. I just that's never been a thing, and I wish there was a bunch of people here. But I mean, the county posted like the same

amount of people could go to a board of county commissioners. I mean, they could go to and there's numerous advisory boards, right? So you could go to all of them. I don't say that it's like, like I don't think I should put it on my Facebook for my business, and that's how because I think.

MRS DUNN

No, I just saw that. I didn't mean it personally to do that. I just county wide, whether there be signs or something out in advance, where hey, I'm driving home from work. I just work my eight hours. I don't sit myself on social media and all that all the time. So you know, if I saw a sign, oh look, they're going to have a meeting, you know, next week. And hey, maybe I talk to my employer because obviously it's during business hours to take time off to attend something like this, that's really important to the county.

CHRIS

Well, that's how this committee started. Was Bryan and I were going to meetings about development, and the county started listening to us what we were saying, and that's how this started. So the more participation in the community, the better results we're going to get. No, I agree. I mean, that's how it was. Just two of us talking at a meeting, you know, against development.

BRYAN

we need it everywhere with elections too, right?

MRS DUNN

Well, how much designs everywhere?

BRYAN

I know, but that's for months and months, and we get 22%. Right, it's pathetic. But just real quick, I know we got close. So I've been on tons of county, state, and national boards and committees, and across the board, there has been minimal, minimal representation from timber. Or, so they have the biggest lobbyists that I've come across. I mean, more money

than I would certainly come across for potatoes, but I would highly encourage all members of Timber to get active, get involved with Farm Bureau if you want, get involved with with anything, get back in the community, and then we can all have that voice. But again, this is public too, so you know, I'd be happy for you to come every meeting. I don't know, I don't know what your schedule is, but in two years, hey, it's going to be made public again. And man, we love it. We try to get a really good representation. We got flowers. We got what Jackee does, what Bill does. I mean, we do. There's a good representation. But timber, I mean, across the board is is lacking representation on boards and committees. And man, I'd be thrilled to see more.

CHRIS

I just know nobody from timber showed up against development. Yeah. I mean, I spent three years at county commissioner meetings. That one person from timber showed up Against development, not one, not one.

CHRIS

So, anything else

PRISSY

before we conclude? Can we please get our dates for November for our quarterly meeting?

BILL

This one is the same one thing to the county and the virtual growers about what the potential market would be just at the University of Florida, but their budget, annual food budget, annual food and meal plan budget at the University of Florida typically ranges 4,500 to 5,500 per academic year for standard campus meal plans, and that's with 50,000 kids, and then the kids that grocery store and self care budgets can vary up to $4,000. We got $4,000 times 50,000 kids and the rest of Gainesville. That's one market that should be available, and you can look at the St. Johns County schools also, and the St. Johns County jails, and all of those commercial facilities would buy from platform that was reliable, and if they were encouraged to support the local farm community for a variety of reasons, that's something that the county could do to help others.

PRISSY

And with that, are y'all agreeable to the next meeting being november 18? Also, yes, yes. So we pushed the meeting today. So the previous meetings have been at six. We did 430 days. We had two members that had doctor appointments, one of which is still a doctor, unfortunately. But do you have a preference of what's better at 430, 6o'clock?

CARLETON

6o'clock. A lot easier. But no, it's a busy time. All right. I'm hoping our Trout Creek facility for that renovation fund.

KEALEY

You've got library.

PRISSY

Thank you. Yeah, I didn't think about the library. We'll go ahead and put the date on the website with the location TBD.

MARIA

You can always come back here.

CHRIS

Make a motion to adjourn.

Bryan makes the motion. Carleton seconds. All in favor, 5-0.

6:20pm