



USDA-CSREES 2007 National Water Quality Conference

Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems (FARMS) Program – Sustaining Agriculture and Water Resources

FARMS is an agricultural Best Management Practice (BMP) cost-share reimbursement program. The program is a public/private partnership developed by the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The purpose of FARMS is to provide an incentive to the agricultural community, to implement agricultural BMPs that will provide resource benefits that include water quality improvement; reduced upper Floridian aquifer withdrawals; and/or conservation, restoration, or augmentation of the area's water resources and ecology. FARMS is an important component in the District's SWUCA Recovery Strategy; intended to assist in the implementation of the District's Regional Water Supply Plan; and compliments the more traditional regulation approach to water resource management. The goal for the FARMS program is to offset forty million gallons per day (mgd) of ground water within the SWUCA by 2025. Ground water use reductions not only benefit ground water levels, but are also designed to improve surface water quality in areas where ground water is highly mineralized. Examples of FARMS Projects include tailwater management and recovery, development of an alternative irrigation source, innovative irrigation management and irrigation well back-plugging. FARMS projects not only offset ground water use with surface water, but also try to increase the overall efficiency of irrigation. Project performance is tracked to determine its effectiveness. With a monetary incentive, the agricultural community has become more receptive and financially able to apply various BMPs. Since the program's implementation, thirty-three projects are Board approved with a projected ten mgd of ground water offset.

Author: Suzanne Chwala-Grant

University Affiliation: Southwest Florida Water Management District

Co-Author(s): William Orendorff