

Department Press Release

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New Fertilizer Rule Will Protect Florida's Water Quality

- Rule brings added benefits to Everglades restoration -

LAKE OKEECHOBEE – The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services today adopted the final statewide Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule. The rule limits the phosphorus and nitrogen content in fertilizers for urban turf and lawns, significantly reducing the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus applied in urban areas and limiting the amount of those compounds reaching Florida's water resources, including Florida's Liquid Heart, Lake Okeechobee.

"We are committed to protecting Florida's water resources," Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) Commissioner Charles H. Bronson said. "By establishing responsible nitrogen and phosphorus use rates statewide, Florida's citizens can continue to care for their lawns and landscapes without sacrificing water quality."

DACS expects a 20 to 25 percent reduction in nitrogen and a 15 percent reduction in phosphorus in every bag of fertilizer sold to the public. The new rule requires that all fertilizer products labeled for use on urban turf, sports turf and lawns be limited to the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus needed to support healthy turf maintenance. It was developed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services with input from the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the state's five water management districts, the Florida League of Cities, Florida Association of Counties, fertilizer manufacturers and concerned citizens.

"Implementation of the new fertilizer rule is vital to Florida's continuous efforts to protect our water and will especially be beneficial to Lake Okeechobee and the estuaries' water quality through source control," said Florida Department of

Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Michael W. Sole. "The new rule will enhance land management practices, improve water quality and protect the health of the Southeast's largest lake and America's Everglades."

As a component of the \$200 million Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery (LOER) Plan, the new rule is an essential component to improve nutrient control through a statewide approach based on sound science and the best-available technology. Water managers will continue to research nutrient application rates to refine the limits and ensure healthy turf while at the same time minimizing the impact of urban land use on the environment. Launched in 2005, LOER is expanding water storage areas, constructing treatment marshes and expediting environmental management initiatives to enhance the ecological health of the lake and downstream coastal estuaries.

"This rule compliments the numerous efforts that are currently underway to address excess nutrients in the Northern and Southern Everglades," said South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Executive Director Carol Wehle. "We look forward to working with the Departments of Agriculture and Environmental Protection as we expand our efforts, integrate new technology, and achieve this important undertaking."

Since the 2000 Florida Legislature passed the Lake Okeechobee Protection Act, DACS, DEP and SFWMD, working with local governments, landowners and the federal partners, have reached notable milestones to restore the lake and its tributaries:

- » Adopting a Lake Okeechobee Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) to achieve phosphorus reductions
- » Constructing the Taylor Creek and Nubbin Slough Stormwater Treatment Areas in partnership with the federal government
- » Completing conservation and nutrient management plans for over 400,000 acres of agricultural lands in the watershed
- » Investing \$7.5 million in individual projects to reduce phosphorus from dairy farms, restore isolated wetlands, treat urban stormwater and enhance water storage and habitat on ranchlands
- » Treating more than 32,000 acres of exotic and invasive vegetation

Restoring America's Everglades is reviving habitat for more than 60 threatened and endangered species, establishing a reliable supply of water for millions of Floridians and providing flood control consistent with the restoration. To date, Florida has invested more than \$2 billion to restore and preserve America's Everglades and \$140 million to improve the health of Lake Okeechobee. For more information visit www.dep.state.fl.us/evergladesforever.

Floridians can help protect water quality through proper application of fertilizer. Floridians should fertilize plants only to maintain health and should not exceed recommended amounts. For more information visit www.floridayards.org.