

Who Benefits From Excessive Fertilizer?

April 5, 2019



The following message is from John Moran. Please read carefully and then act according to your convictions and abilities.

He poses important questions as to the leadership of Florida's flagship university. Are there suggestions that IFAS might be operating with bias towards contributors?

How powerful are contributions from industry? Can they influence our major university's comportment? And can they influence the health of our priceless water resources?

Read this and perhaps write to President Fuchs voicing your concerns.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

Friends of Florida,

Guided by the legal and ethical imperative to clean up our waters, the Alachua County Commission is poised to implement the strongest lawn fertilizer code in Florida.

The ordinary use of this legal product is injurious to environmental health but unsurprisingly, there is pushback to

the County's proposed code revision from those who profit from polluting our waters.

It's time to end the fiction that we can fertilize our way back to clean water. In my Gainesville Sun op-ed linked below, I make the case why now is the time to stand up and be a voice for our waters.

If you are so moved, I encourage you to attend the public hearing on Tuesday, April 9th at 5 p.m. in the County Administration Building at 12 SE 1st St. in Gainesville.

You can email the Commission directly at bocc@alachuacounty.us

And for reasons made clear in my comments below, you may choose to copy University of Florida President Kent Fuchs and IFAS director Jack Payne with your message to the Commission.

They can be reached at president@ufl.edu and jackpayne@ufl.edu

Feel free, of course, to share this message widely.

Change is hard, but the need is evident and urgent.

For the love of Florida,

John Moran

<https://www.gainesville.com/opinion/20190403/john-moran-its-time-to-unfriend-fertilizer>

John Moran: It's time to unfriend fertilizer

The pollution that is sickening Florida waters and threatening human health is caused by agricultural and lawn fertilizer, and human and animal waste. County governments are legally obligated to reduce this nutrient loading.

Fertilizer application by Alachua County farmers adds an estimated 460,433 pounds of nitrogen to the aquifer in the watershed of the Santa Fe River each year, according to an analysis of state data by the Florida Springs Institute. "Nutrients" may sound nutritious, but they fuel the growth of

slime in many of our favorite springs.

Because Florida is a right-to-farm state, county government is preempted from regulating farmers. And so the Alachua County Commission is set to decide on April 9 whether to strengthen the county fertilizer code beyond minimum state standards.

Lawn fertilizer is the target, and passage of the new code would usher in a countywide nine-month blackout period. The revised code – Florida’s strictest – would limit application of lawn fertilizers containing nitrogen and/or phosphorus to April through June.

That’s the background. Now comes the push-back. An out-of-county green industry consultant, representing local stakeholders, is telling the County Commission to back off, insisting that summertime fertilizer blackouts don’t work.

Fertilizer and turf industry reps routinely travel the state, telling local governments the science doesn’t support attempts to regulate them and anyway, septic tanks are the real culprit here, never mind that flushing is essential while fertilizer is not.

So what are we to make of the fertilizer conundrum?

Our waters are a mess and we know how we got here. From the slime-encrusted rivers flowing from Lake Okeechobee, to the beleaguered springs of North Florida, fertilizer is a scourge that is destroying our waters. And the industries that profit from using this stuff are quick to say “don’t blame us” or “we’re doing our best.”

At the nexus of many threads connecting state waters you’ll find IFAS, the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

IFAS' distinguished record of service to Florida is not without contradiction. IFAS effectively functions as the central nervous system of the lawn-industrial complex, a cozy relationship well-entrenched as a model of institutional inertia.

In the wake of Florida's devastating 2018 Summer of Slime, in which fertilizer has clearly been implicated, the IFAS prescription continues to read, "More, please."

Online and at public events, you needn't look hard to find IFAS-branded "Florida-Friendly Fertilizing Tips." The messaging explicitly states that you just might need to fertilize even "if your landscape is healthy and its appearance is pleasing."

It's no accident the words "friendly" and "fertilizing" rub shoulders here. Under the banner of "Trust us, we're experts," this is a purposeful effort by IFAS to normalize the abuse of our surface waters, and the Floridan Aquifer – the source of our drinking water.

Riddled with more holes than the aquifer, IFAS' brand of Swiss-cheese science demonstrably fails to account for what happens to all that nitrogen pollution wrought by lawn fertilizer. IFAS knows the numbers don't add up, even as they give cover to an industry whose view of the matter is seen through the lens of their wallets.

And then there's water quantity, hit hard by all that aquifer-sucking turf grass in a state where half of household water is still being poured on the ground. By 2030, we'll need another 1.3 billion gallons of fresh water each day over 2010 water use.

The message from IFAS to industry is, "We're here for you." As for our public waters, "Not so much."

Here's the deal: Slime loves fertilizer. They're happy together. But if more fertilizer is the answer, we need better questions.

If the UF mission statement to shape a better future is more than just pixels in the ether, then UF President Kent Fuchs would do well to disband and defund the IFAS turf/fertilizer research and advocacy program.

Those tax dollars would be better spent developing science-driven strategic communications to advance positive social change. We don't need to build a better addiction. We need to help Floridians wean themselves from this harmful habit altogether.

If your chemically dependent, irrigation-intensive turf grass lawn can't survive without life support, that's nature's way of saying let it go.

If you love our springs then let's be wise. Resist the urge to fertilize.

It takes strength to let go. Be strong, Florida.