

**Minutes**  
**Agricultural & Natural Resources Advisory Committee**  
**Thursday March 9, 2023, at 9:00 am**  
**E. Jay Carlson Building**  
**Large Conference Room**  
**18400 Murdock Circle**  
**Port Charlotte, FL 33948-1094**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Andy Dodd, Chairman  
Nigel Morris, Vice-Chairman  
Lindsay Harrington  
Dan Ryals  
Scott Schroeder  
David Kemeny

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Joel Beverly  
Steve Smith

**GUEST SPEAKERS**

Fritz Roka-Director, Center for Agribusiness FGCU

**STAFF**

Commissioner Tiseo  
Assistant Morgan Cook – Commission Liaison  
Shaun Cullinan, Planning & Zoning Official  
Marie Valeus, Administrative Assistant II  
Janette Knowlton- County Attorney

**GUESTS**

William Batson – Ag Deputy- CCSO

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**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL/DETERMINATION OF QUORUM**

The March 9, 2023, meeting of the Agricultural and Natural Resources Advisory Committee was called to order at 9:04 a.m. by Chairman Dodd.

**ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO AGENDA**

None

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### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Chairman Dodd called for a motion on the minutes for the September 8, 2022, ANRAC Meeting. Lindsay Harrington made a motion to approve, seconded by Dan Ryals; the motion passed unanimously.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Fritz Roka – Director, Center for Agribusiness FGCU

Mr. Roka introduced himself giving a brief introduction of how he came into his trade of agriculture. He states he did not grow up on a farm but used to visit an uncle on his farm. Later in life at the University of Maryland he saw some agriculture economics classes being offered and joined, that's what started him on his agricultural journey. Mr. Roka sets up his presentation on Agribusiness and begins.

Lindsay Harrington makes a comment about the agribusiness program and that there are a lot of good people on the board and that he enjoys the program and hopes it becomes a major at the school.

Mr. Roka speaks about the program being 4 ½ years old, it's on the young side. Agribusiness includes more than farming, there are more behind the scenes things going on. They are seeing students go all the way through the program as an academic minor.

Mr. Roka says he gives full credit to Dr. Mike Martin for starting the Agribusiness. The program started with 2 classes 29 students 1 teacher. The second year another teacher was added. The class went to 65 students and in 2021 they went to online classes. Numbers are still picking up.

Currently Charlotte and Desoto high school participate in the program. High school students interact with growers to learn about the business. The goal is to teach students so they can get a job in the field of agriculture.

Mr. Nigel Morris brings up the cannabis business and growing medical marijuana. Mr. Roka says there are classes and certificates given for that type of work. Everything is internal seed to sell, it is very expensive. He also states he is more interested in the hemp side of growing. Hemp is legal- no THC.

Mr. Andy Dodd asks if anyone is currently growing hemp in SW Florida, Mr. Roka says very limited.

Mr. Scott Schroeder says "it is a good cover crop, but the seed is too expensive"

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Mr. Roka changes the subject and says that he has always wanted to have a class all about farm tours. This year they were finally able to make it happen. Once a week for 5 hours for 8 weeks, that satisfied the academic requirements for contact hours. They went to over 10 operations over the course of 6 weeks.

It's part academic, including research and a presentation at the end.

Andy asks if kids are filling the FGCU Agribusiness class as an elective just to fill spots? Also, if any of the kids are in the AG business to get the minor?

Mr. Roka says yes and no, it is a mix, but they are seeing more and more attending for AG purposes.

Mr. Roka talks about in the future having a high school AG class, where the high schooler gets college credit for it. They already know of another school offering this. They take the class, get credit, take a test, and then get a certificate. He states they are also interested in having internships.

Janette Knowlton-County Attorney asks for a card from Mr. Roka. She would like to talk further because the County Commissioners are interested in internships for a project.

Joe Tiseo- Commissioner, talks about the other programs offered at the high school level. He suggests if the students do get a certification from AG, it could be used towards other class credits towards their major not just AG.

Mr. Roka talks about other classes offered at FGCU

Mr. Tiseo states that high school exposure is good but maybe think about middle school exposure. Try to get the kids exposed younger to the opportunities in AG and Agribusiness.

Mr. Roka talks about in Lee and Collier County the Junior Achievers-Inspire program trying to get 10,000 8<sup>th</sup> graders April 26, 27, and 28<sup>th</sup> for an exposure fair for careers they could be doing. He says next year they would like to bring that to Charlotte County and expand it to more than 8<sup>th</sup> graders. He says AG is important and a big deal in our area.

Mr. Roka talks about the new president coming to FGCU within the next 6 months and how he hopes he too will care about AG.

Mr. Harrington says the advisory board making the decision on the next president will be asking questions regarding AG to ensure it stays.

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**Old Business**

Community Development Update-

Shaun Cullinan talks about our permitting. The numbers have tripled averaging intake of 8,400-9,800 permits a month. Lots of permits still coming. Babcock makes up 1/3 of the permits. We are still trying to fill positions.

Regarding AG -

There are some applications for mining operations, groves converting to mining operations.

Mr. Dodd asks about any more rural development, Shaun says "no, not really"

**CORRESPONDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS**

None

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

**STAFF COMMENTS**

Mr.Dodd asked the deputy to introduce himself.

Deputy William Batson, CCSO Agriculture Deputy

**MEMBER COMMENTS**

Mr. Harrington states that FPL has been making some large land purchases.

Nigel Morris asks about rumors of FPL buying land for solar panels and its effects to AG

Members would like to know what FPL is doing

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**MEMBER COMMENTS**

Mr. Harrington states that FPL has been making some large land purchases.

Nigel Morris is concerned about the amount of productive agricultural acreage that is being converted to solar panels.

Morgan Cook says she knows someone at FPL and will request that they make a presentation to ANRAC on their development of solar in Florida

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**FUTURE MEETING TOPICS**

Land survey process, land description

Brandon Moody water quality update

FPL presentation about what they are doing

**NEXT MEETING**

- ❖ May 11, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. in the E. Jay Carlson Building large conference room.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Dodd -meeting was adjourned at 10:11 a.m.



Andy Dodd,  
Chairman

Minutes of the Agricultural & Natural Resources Advisory Committee  
Approved this 9th day of Nov. 2023.