

## *The Manatee Agricultural Reuse System (MARS) Farm Connection Grant Program*



The Florida West Coast RC&D Council rolled out the Manatee Agricultural Reuse System (MARS) Farm Connection Grant Program this week. The formal program rollout was done as a presentation to the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday, June 14. RC&D Coordinator, Laura Morton, briefed the County Commissioners on the details of the grants, timescale of implementation, funding status, and evaluation plans for the program.

The Florida West Coast RC&D staff led the effort in developing the program. Britton Miller, Communications Manager, coordinated program development and the review process and Owrang Kashef, MARS Project Manager developed the technical details. There were three Board members of the RC&D that were critical in getting the program rolled out as well: Charlie Hunsicker, John O'Connor, and Clive Morris contributed an enormous amount of volunteer time to hold meetings to plan for the program, review program policies, and finalize the program details.

The Manatee Agricultural Reuse System (MARS) will reduce aquifer withdrawals in the [Southern Water Use Caution Area](#), where withdrawals now exceed safe levels. Manatee County is close to finishing the construction of a transmission pipeline interconnecting three (3) regional wastewater treatment plants to deliver reclaimed water to agricultural users of scarce groundwater resources.

In addition to various sources of Federal, state, and local funding to build the main transmission line, there is a total of \$6.5 Million in Congressional direct appropriations to assist with farmers connecting to the transmission line. The Florida West Coast RC&D Council is under agreement with the NRCS to develop, implement, and evaluate this grant program. The NRCS-Florida West Coast RC&D Council partnership is key to the success of the MARS project by providing funds for growers to connect their irrigation systems to the County's main reuse water transmission line.

More information is available at the Florida West Coast RC&D office or on the Council's website at [www.fwcrd.org](http://www.fwcrd.org). Contact Laura Morton, RC&D Coordinator, at (941) 723-3252 or [laura.morton@fl.usda.gov](mailto:laura.morton@fl.usda.gov).