

Plant nursery takes recycled water to next level

Simpson Nurseries (Jefferson County) has recycled water for years. So when the City of Monticello approached them with the prospect of using reclaimed water to irrigate, the choice was simple.

Nearly 30 years ago, the nursery designed a system to capture stormwater and irrigation runoff to be reused for irrigation. That system continues to recycle water today. Tarps and liners placed under potted plants catch irrigation and stormwater, and the system directs that runoff into holding ponds to be stored and reused.

Thad Beshears, whose family has owned the business for 36 years, remembers his father, Fred, taking the lead on creating the system. The ground was contoured, swales were built, culverts and pipes were installed – all to recycle water.

“We considered this project cutting edge at the time,” said Thad. “My dad knew that water was a precious asset then, and we continue to practice environmental stewardship today.”

Now Simpson Nurseries has taken the concept of using recycled water a step further. In addition to making good use of runoff, they now use highly treated wastewater for irrigation, thanks to the City’s newly established reclaimed water program. With a \$1.5 million grant from



Transmission pipes send reclaimed water from the City’s treatment plant to Simpson Nurseries where it is stored in ponds and then reused for irrigation.

the Suwannee River Water Management District (District), the City of Monticello upgraded its treatment plant, built a reclaimed water reservoir, and installed pipes and a pump station to send water to the nursery.

Simpson Nurseries currently receives 400,000-500,000 gallons of reclaimed water daily to irrigate 800 acres of trees and shrubs. This allows them to offset much of their groundwater use, and it saves the City about \$20,000 per year that was once spent to maintain and monitor

the previous system that discharged into a series of wetlands.

The City of Monticello hopes to provide reclaimed water to additional customers in the future, including a local ball field and a golf course.

Thad Beshears calls the project a win, win. “Irrigating with reuse water is good for the environment and it’s more cost-effective for us,” he said.

The District commends the City and nursery for helping to protect our water resources.

What is reuse water and why should we use it?

Wastewater utilities that have adopted a reclaimed water program have the capacity to treat wastewater to a higher standard to be made available to customers for irrigation, toilet flushing, clothes washing, and other non-potable uses.

Using reclaimed water for such purposes not only recycles water, but it reduces the demands on groundwater pumped from the Floridan Aquifer, the

source of our clean drinking water.

The District is working with wastewater utilities within its 15-county region to develop the capacity to produce reuse water. To date the District has provided technical assistance and funding to Lake City, Live Oak, Monticello, Alachua and Cedar Key. These projects collectively have the potential to offset about 5 million gallons of groundwater use per day.

The District will expand its reuse program to other areas when funding becomes available.

Reclaimed water will mostly be made available to large customers, such as golf courses, ball fields, prisons, and nurseries. It may also be available for residential lawn and landscape irrigation in some areas. Contact your local wastewater utility for information.

Farmers honored for protecting environment

“Farming since he was a boy,” Wesley Sache can talk for hours about how farming has changed over the years. He remembers when his grandfather plowed with a mule, his family purchased a tractor, and his father installed an electric fence to keep the hogs in.

He has also seen changes to farm practices that have improved the environment. One of the most notable, he recalls, is the advent of the drip irrigation system his farm now uses to irrigate watermelons and cantaloupes.

Sache cultivated his first crop of melons in the 70s when he was studying agriculture in college. Irrigating them with stationary guns and pipe that had to be rotated around the field was a chore.

“We would water an area for two hours and then have to move the pipes to another location,” he remembers of the daunting task. “It took 24 hours just to water 20 acres.”

Now through drip irrigation, Sache says he can irrigate 40-80 acres of melons at one time on his Levy County farm. The method applies water and fertilizer near the root zone to give a precise application. The result is a healthier crop and environment.

Drip irrigation is just one tool that area



LEFT: The Sache family, center, is pictured at the CARES dinner with Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, far left, and Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick, far right.

farmers are using to save and protect water through the Suwannee River Partnership (SRP), a program that is partially funded by the District.

Sache and his son, Jake, were among 19 farmers recognized for their efforts on June 30 at the 11th Annual County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship (CARES) dinner.

The Florida Farm Bureau and the SRP created CARES to highlight efforts by farmers to conserve water and improve nutrient management in the Suwannee and Santa Fe river basins.

Following are those recognized at the

CARES dinner and the counties in which their farms are located: Alachua -- Green Acres Farm, Graham Farm, and UF/IFAS Boston Farm/Santa Fe River Ranch Beef Unit; Bradford -- Jerry and Sam Williams, Cognito Farm; Columbia -- Rodney Dicks and Sons; Gilchrist -- Nolan C. Galloway III, Canaan Ranch Timber Farm and MoBo Angus Farm; Hamilton -- Goolsby Farms, Father and Son Farm, Morgan and Washington Hay Farm, Swift Creek Farm, Stormant Farms, and Edward Carter Farm; Lafayette -- Lafayette Dairy and Lyons Poultry; Levy -- Sache Farms; Madison -- KayLee Farm and Hunter Farm; and Suwannee -- Cannon Farms.

News briefs

Wastewater Management

The District's Governing Board voted July 12 to award the Big Bend Water Authority a grant for reimbursement costs of up to \$250,000 to assist with sewer connections in Steinhatchee and Jena. The authority expects the funding will add 250 existing homes and business to its wastewater system.

Assisting coastal communities with wastewater management has been a long-term District priority to protect water quality. To date, the District has provided funds to help establish wastewater systems in the Town of Suwannee, Town of Cedar Key, and the Taylor Coastal Water and Sewer District.

Fiscal Year 2012 Budget

On July 12, the District's Governing Board approved a tentative fiscal year 2011-12 budget of \$47,124,589 and proposed millage rate of 0.4250.

The tentative budget represents a 17 percent reduction over last year's budget and the tentative millage rate reflects a 3 percent reduction over last year's millage rate.

The District will hold two public hearings – Sept. 13 and Sept. 27 – before the budget and millage rate are adopted. Both meetings will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the District's headquarters in Live Oak at the corner of U.S. 90 and CR 49.

Hydrologic Conditions

In June, the District continued to receive below-normal rainfall, with an average of 5.10 inches District-wide. Deficits nearing 25 inches persisted in the upper Aucilla, Suwannee, and Santa Fe basins. Five gages on the upper Suwannee River and its tributaries reported the lowest flows on record and the Santa Fe River at Worthington Springs reported no flow for 30 consecutive days.

The District continues to experience drought conditions and a Water Shortage Advisory remains in effect, which calls for all water users to voluntarily eliminate non-essential uses of water.