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Stetson University Seeks Proposals on Sustainable Farming

\$300,000 in grants available to farmers in Suwannee River Basin

DELAND, Florida, Aug. 13, 2018 – The Sustainable Farming Fund administered by Stetson University Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience (IWER) is seeking proposals to award up to \$300,000 in grants to private farmers in the Suwannee River Basin for sustainable farming practices.

The Sustainable Farming Fund was established through court order by the federal district court in Jacksonville. IWER has three years to award up to \$1.3 million from the fund. As an independent third party, IWER was selected to help farmers reduce pollution draining into the Suwannee River and area springs. The fund, to be administered by the water institute, will provide grants to farmers based on proposals.

“We’re looking to move the needle with these grants,” said IWER Executive Director Clay Henderson. “We expect to get some innovative proposals to reduce fertilizer use and enhance water conservation. These are key to protecting the springs in north Florida.”

Over the summer, Henderson met with government agencies, agricultural and environmental groups, and local farmers to better understand what is needed and what farmers are willing to try. Improved technology and innovative farming practices will be required to meet the need for reducing nutrients in the aquifer.

“Science shows us that increased nutrients in the aquifer is the major cause of decline in water quality in our springs,” Henderson said. Nearly every Florida spring shows visible signs of stress and pollution such as lack of clarity in the water.

The request for grant proposals was timed to coincide with the release of the Suwannee River Basin Management Action Plan. The plan was approved by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in June and sets forth a goal of reduction of more than four million pounds of nitrogen per year over the next 20 years in order to meet water quality standards for the springs that flow into the Suwannee River. The plan requires farmers to use Best Management Practices but acknowledges the goals cannot be achieved unless farmers use precision agricultural techniques to reduce fertilizer use beyond that required by BMPs. The

Sustainable Farming Fund will incentivize farmers to take advantage of new technology and innovative techniques.

The Sustainable Farming Fund was established through a consent decree in a water quality lawsuit brought by Sierra Club and Environmental America against Pilgrim's Pride, Corp., the nation's second largest chicken producer.

More information and instructions on how to submit a proposal can be found at www.stetson.edu/sff. Proposals will be accepted through Sept. 4.

About Stetson University

Founded in 1883, [Stetson University](http://www.stetson.edu) is the oldest private university in Central Florida, providing a transforming education in the liberal arts tradition. Stetson stresses academic excellence and community-engaged learning, and consistently earns high marks in national rankings. Stetson encourages its students to go beyond success to significance in their lives, the lives of others and their communities. [Stay connected](#) with Stetson on social media.