

From: [Jon Thaxton](#)
To: [Nicholas Pachota](#); [Jim Boldt](#); [Joan Farrell](#); [Rachel Frank](#); [Rick Howard](#); [Helen Moore](#); [Ronald Smith](#); [Liz.Alpert@SarasotaFL.gov](#); [Jen Ahearn-Koch](#); [Erik Arroyo](#); [Kyle Battie](#); [Debbie Trice](#) ([Debbie.Trice@SarasotaFL.gov](#)); [Mark Smith](#); [Ron Cutsinger](#); [Michael Moran](#); [Joe Neunder](#); [nrainford@scgov.net](#)
Cc: [Edward Lavallee](#); [Marlon Brown](#); [jrlewis@scgov.net](#)
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Attachments: [SRQ Local Summer fertilizer bans.docx](#)
[image001.png](#)
[image002.png](#)

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Commissioners and Council Members,

I am writing today to offer an opportunity to sign on to an [elected official letter to legislators](#) in defense of home rule and to save strong local urban fertilizer ordinances from preemption. Since 2007, local governments across the state have been steadily adopting strong, rainy season application ban urban fertilizer ordinances. Sarasota County was the first County to do so. Today [18 counties and more than 100 municipalities](#) are protected by common-sense policies that help reduce the flow of urban fertilizer pollution that fuels the harmful algae outbreaks that hurt our waterfront economies.

During the last legislative session, a year-long moratorium on strict urban fertilizer ordinance adoption was implemented. There is a great deal of concern that an extension, or even an expansion, of that moratorium, may arise in some form during the current legislative session.

Time is of the essence. This [official sign-on letter](#) is one tool the collective of local governments, businesses, and clean water organizations can use to stop the preemption of strong, local urban fertilizer ordinances.

You can reference the University of Florida IFAS report, [Effectiveness of the timing of seasonal fertilizer restrictions on urban landscapes](#), which contains nothing that would justify relaxing urban fertilizer restrictions. The report makes it clear that the [Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force, back in 2007](#), was correct in its conclusion that a local watershed-by-watershed approach, as opposed to one statewide rule, was the only way to go, and that local governments should retain the ability to protect their own waterfront economies from urban fertilizer pollution. For your reference, here are our [initial talking points](#) in response to the release of the report.

Another very useful tool is the recently released [report on the Impacts of Water Quality on the Southwest Florida Economy](#) that underscores offers real data to support what local governments already know: The damage poor water quality and toxic algae blooms do to a local economy can be catastrophic.

Attached is an op ed I submitted for publication in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, an [edited version](#) was published on January 12. I offer the unedited version as it describes the amazing work Sarasota County has done to improve water quality.

Please help us defend our waterfronts and home rule.



Jon Thaxton

Senior Vice-President for Community Leadership

c 941.223.1198 | w GULFCOASTCF.ORG

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We are committed to a culture of sustainability across our organization. As a [Certified Sarasota County Green Business Partner](#), we are working for the future, today.

Recently, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune published an article entitled "[Fertilizer bans need more study](#)." The story covers the state Legislature-commissioned report, "[Effectiveness of the Timing of SEASONAL FERTILIZER RESTRICTIONS on URBAN LANDSCAPES](#)." The purpose of this "Report" written by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is to "provide a literature review of the most recent and relevant studies linking fertilization of urban landscapes with nutrient export to the environment, and potential subsequent water quality concerns in Florida." The report concludes that "Florida needs a thorough, years-long study to determine whether local fertilizer ordinances decrease water pollution that can feed algae blooms."

Spoiler alert -- nowhere in the Report, is there any suggestion that an urban fertilizer ordinance, such as the one adopted by the Sarasota County Commission, is not effective in reducing harmful nutrients. In fact, if you dig into the abstract summaries for many of the studies referenced in the Report, you will find support for fertilizer restrictions.

Nothing in the Report suggests that seasonal urban fertilizer bans are bad for water quality, but rather that they have had a positive influence. Inasmuch as urban fertilizer bans are little to no cost to local governments, fertilizer manufacturers have had compliant products in place for well over 15 years, and cost-effective measures like urban fertilizer ordinances reduce the need for more costly infrastructure projects.

The Report also made it clear that the 2007 Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force was correct in its conclusion that a watershed-by-watershed approach would be the most effective approach in a state as economically and ecologically diverse as Florida, versus a one-size-fits all statewide rule. The Report concluded that local governments should retain the ability to protect their own waterfront economies and water quality from urban fertilizer pollution.

Not surprising, the report recommends: "To fully understand the effect of fertilizer ordinances and other strategies to mitigate nutrient pollution and improve water quality, thorough study of the topic is required" and "results from this study would facilitate better decisions regarding future regulations and public funding to remediate this ongoing problem statewide." Research institutions are known for their promotion of funding further research, often leading to paralysis by analysis.

It makes no sense to spend more hard-earned taxpayer dollars on another study to confirm what everyone already knows: Less nitrogen on the ground means less nitrogen polluting our lakes, streams, rivers, and bays. Advocates and elected

officials have always recognized the lack of "perfect knowledge" because of the complications created by local environmental conditions, soil profiles, topography, weather, and the multitude of other human-based nutrient sources. This is not a secret, and this Report does not deserve credit for stating what has been obvious to all involved over the last 20 years.

Even more obvious is the Report's statement that "Fertilizer is not the only anthropogenic source of nutrients to water bodies. Therefore, fertilizer ordinances alone will not address the issue." Every local government in Florida is aware of this fact and has been since before the first urban fertilizer ordinance was adopted in Sarasota County. And the Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force reported that nutrient pollution had multiple sources and fertilizer restrictions alone would not remedy the state's water quality problems.

Perhaps the most egregious of the Report's conclusions is that "fertilizer bans had ultimately diverted attention, efforts, and funds that potentially could have been more effective if allocated to reducing human waste impacts." It is curious that the report provides zero evidence to support this conclusion. Statewide, local governments, such as Sarasota County, that have enacted fertilizer ordinances, have been taking extraordinary steps to improve water quality.

A partial list of Sarasota County's efforts to combat nutrient pollution include, converting sewer treatment plants to AWT, creating the state's first stormwater environmental utility, funding one of the state's most successful environmental lands protection programs, and habitat restoration projects such as Donna Bay and the Celery Fields. An impressive and complete list can be found on the [county's website](#). Collectively these efforts represent a local investment of close to a billion dollars. Contrary to the Report's unsubstantiated claim, I would suggest that those Florida counties that have adopted fertilizer ordinances, have invested more "attention, efforts, and funds" to reduce nutrient pollution than those counties that have not.

Elected officials have a duty and fiduciary responsibility to protect public health and spend taxpayer dollars wisely, and there is nothing in the University of Florida IFAS evaluation that would justify relaxing urban fertilizer restrictions or preempting local officials from protecting their communities' waterways.

Jon Thaxton is a former Sarasota County Commissioner and has served on numerous water quality advisory committees including the Florida Consumer Fertilizer Task Force. He is currently a Sr. VP at Gulf Coast Community Foundation where he edited and co-authored the [Community Playbook for Healthy Waterways](#)