

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Appropriations

BILL: CS/SB 312

INTRODUCER: Community Affairs Committee and Senator Simpson and others

SUBJECT: Agriculture

DATE: April 21, 2014

REVISED: _____

| | ANALYST | STAFF DIRECTOR | REFERENCE | ACTION |
|----|----------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------------|
| 1. | <u>Akhvein</u> | <u>Becker</u> | <u>AG</u> | Favorable |
| 2. | <u>White</u> | <u>Yeatman</u> | <u>CA</u> | Fav/CS |
| 3. | <u>Babin</u> | <u>Diez-Arguelles</u> | <u>AFT</u> | Fav/CS |
| 4. | <u>Babin</u> | <u>Kynoch</u> | <u>AP</u> | Pre-meeting |

Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

I. Summary:

CS/SB 312 allows agricultural land to retain an agricultural classification when the land owner participates in a water retention program sponsored by a water management district or the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the bill requires these lands to be assessed at a de minimis value.

The bill also expands the sales tax exemption for certain farm equipment to include:

- Equipment used in the storage of agricultural products;
- Irrigation equipment, including replacement parts and accessories;
- Repairs of power farm equipment and irrigation equipment; and
- Trailers used in agricultural production and transportation of farm products.

The Revenue Estimating Conference has not determined the impact of the provisions of this bill. Staff estimates that this bill will reduce local property taxes by \$100,000, and the bill will significantly reduce general revenue receipts.

II. Present Situation:

Property Valuation in Florida

The Florida Constitution requires that all property be assessed at just value (fair market value) for ad valorem tax purposes. However, sections 3, 4, and 6, Article VII of the Florida Constitution, provide for specified assessment limitations, property classifications, and exemptions. After the property appraiser has considered any assessment limitation or use classification affecting the just value of a property, the assessed value is determined. The assessed value is then reduced by any applicable exemptions to produce the taxable value.

Agricultural Property Classification

Section 193.461, F.S., provides that each county's property appraiser shall, for assessment purposes on an annual basis, classify all lands within a county as agricultural or nonagricultural. For property to be classified as agricultural land, it must be used "primarily for bona fide agricultural purposes." Agricultural purposes include, but are not limited to: horticulture; floriculture; viticulture; forestry; dairy; livestock; poultry; bee; pisciculture, when the land is used principally for the production of tropical fish; aquaculture, including algaculture; sod farming; and all forms of farm products and farm production.

Property appraisers are required to reclassify lands as nonagricultural when they are diverted from an agricultural to a nonagricultural use or no longer utilized for agricultural purposes.

In response to the spread of citrus canker, the 2000 Legislature authorized lands to retain agricultural classification and be assessed at a de minimis value of no more than \$50 per acre if the owner took the land out of production due to a state or federal eradication or quarantine program. These lands retain the agricultural classification and de minimis assessment as long as they are not used to produce income or used for a nonagricultural use.

Water Retention Programs

The Legislature encourages and supports the development of creative public-private partnerships and programs that facilitate or further the restoration of the surface water resources of the Lake Okeechobee watershed, the Caloosahatchee River watershed, and the St. Lucie River watershed. Since 2005, the South Florida Water Management District has been working with agencies, environmental organizations, land owners, and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private and public lands. Over the years, these efforts have made thousands of acre-feet of water retention and storage available.

Water retention systems serve to control storm water volume before it is discharged to surface waters or floods urban areas. The systems also act to minimize point source and non-point source pollution prior to its entry into streams, natural wetlands, and other receiving waters. These systems vary widely in their pollutant removal capabilities, but can effectively remove a number of contaminants with removal rates as high as 95 and 99 percent for some non-dissolved nutrients and pesticides, respectively.

Eight Florida ranchers participated in a \$6 million pilot program run by the South Florida Water Management District called the “Florida Ranchlands Environmental Services Project.” The program, which ran from 2006 to 2011, paid ranchers to construct water retention areas on their properties that acted as natural phosphorous filters. In addition to construction costs, the program paid ranchers for annual maintenance and a participation fee for three years. The district also created a \$3 million water farming pilot project that will pay citrus growers to build systems to store excess water on fallow citrus land before it can flow into estuaries.

Sales and Use Tax

Florida provides a sales tax exemption for certain farm equipment. In order to qualify, the equipment must be “power farm equipment” used exclusively on a farm or in a forest for the agricultural production of crops or for fire prevention and suppression work with respect to such crops. The exemption applies to the “sale, rental, lease, use, consumption or storage for use in this state of power farm equipment”; the provision does not exempt the repair of power farm equipment.

“Power farm equipment” is limited to moving or stationary equipment that contains within itself the means for its own propulsion or depends upon an external power source to perform its functions. Sales of component parts of power farm equipment are not exempt unless the component part is, by itself, power farm equipment. For example, the sale of a complete irrigation supply system would be exempt as the sale of power farm equipment; however, the sale of a pipe that will be used to update an existing system is not exempt.

Agricultural production is limited to practices necessary to accomplish the production of plants and animals through the harvest phase. Power farm equipment used in activities that occur after harvesting, such as processing, is not exempt.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 allows agricultural lands to be used in water retention programs sponsored by the Department of Environmental Protection or a water management district without losing their agricultural classification. These lands will be assessed at a de minimis value.

Section 2 amends the definition of “agricultural production” to include the storage phase of agricultural production, thereby expanding the exemption for power farm equipment to include equipment used in the storage of agricultural products.

Section 3 amends the exemption for farm equipment to include:

- Irrigation equipment;
- The repair of power farm equipment and irrigation equipment;
- Replacement parts and accessories for power farm equipment or irrigation equipment;
- Trailers used in agricultural production and the transportation of farm products from the farm to the first point of sale.

Section 4 provides that this act shall take effect July 1, 2014.

IV. Constitutional Issues:**A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

This bill reduces the authority that counties have to raise revenues. Section 18(b) of Article VII of the Florida Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the membership of each house in order to enact a general law reducing the authority that municipalities and counties had on February 1, 1989, to raise revenues in the aggregate. By adding an exemption to the state sales tax, the bill has the effect of adding an exemption to the local option county sales tax and may be subject to the two-thirds requirement. e.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

The Revenue Estimating Conference has not determined the fiscal impact of CS/SB 312. Staff estimates that this bill will reduce local property taxes by \$100,000, and the bill will reduce general revenue receipts significantly.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Under the conditions described in the bill, participants in water retention programs may have reduced ad valorem tax liability for flooded lands. The proposed legislation allows agricultural producers to benefit from reduced tax liability for purchases of specified agricultural items, such as parts and repairs for irrigation equipment.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 193.461, 212.02, and 212.08.

IX. Additional Information:

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS by Community Affairs on January 8, 2014:

The CS classifies flooded lands as agricultural lands for property tax valuation purposes, instead of classifying the use of such lands as nonincome-producing. Flooded lands in recognized water storage programs, or successor programs, would be assessed at a de minimis value, on a single year methodology, and this provision would not expire.

The CS removes provisions that would have defined “qualified agricultural producer,” and authorized the Department of Revenue to issue certificates for agricultural sales and use tax exemptions.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.