

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

A Quarterly Publication of the North Central Florida Regional Planning Council
Winter 2002



COUNCIL PROVIDES FUNDS TO CLAM FARMERS

The Regional Planning Council is approaching the final stages of its Ford Foundation sponsored Coastal Program. This includes providing a \$75,000 grant to the Hidden Coast Shellfish Producers Association (HCSPA) to help insure that the successes achieved since 1997 will be sustained.

To date the program has concentrated on helping net fishers to transfer their occupational skills to clam farming. And, in many respects, much success has been realized. However, many formidable obstacles also have been encountered, such as inappropriate and unnecessary environmental regulations, lack of knowledge of international marketing techniques, and having no organizational capacity to bring about changes now and to sustain future activities. Many of these problems have been resolved, primarily through the efforts of the Association, which was formed during the early part of the program.

The Association now faces even greater hurdles: Disease has caused reduced production, clam farmers have been unable to secure adequate seed clams to increase production, and the clam nursery which was constructed some four years ago needs modifications to be

fully productive. These problems have combined to prevent the Association members from being able to develop and sustain a foreign market, which is critical since current economic conditions and competition have made it very difficult to be successful by serving only the domestic market.

Some progress has been made in addressing these problems. For example, the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has agreed to undertake a four-year study of the applicable areas of the Gulf of Mexico to identify and hopefully

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From left to right W.D. Higginbotham, NCFRPC; D. Capo, HCSPA; J. Spradley, HCSPA; J. Valentine, Dixie County Commission; J. Fulford, HCSPA; L. Sturmer, IFAS, working on terms of the \$75,000 grant.

CDBG NEWS

During the past several months, Council staff assisted 3 local governments with the development of 4 applications requesting \$2.5 million of CDBG grants as follows:

Bradford County Housing	\$750,000
Taylor County Housing	\$600,000
Madison (City)	
Commercial Revitalization	\$600,000
Madison (City) Housing	\$600,000

The Florida Department of Community Affairs recently announced grant awards for the above referenced housing projects for Bradford and Taylor counties and the commercial revitalization downtown project for the City of Madison.

In addition, the Council is currently administering \$3.9 million of **CDBG** grants received during previous funding cycles for the **cities of Lake City, Live Oak, Mayo and Perry, and Columbia and Suwannee Counties.**

NCFRPC SERVICES AVAILABLE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESSES

- ◆ local comprehensive plans
- ◆ land development regulations
- ◆ transportation plans
- ◆ transportation disadvantaged plans
- ◆ disaster mitigation and recovery plans
- ◆ emergency response plans
- ◆ hazardous waste verification
- ◆ CDBG grant applications
- ◆ CDBG grant administration
- ◆ FRDAP grant applications
- ◆ tourism development
- ◆ general economic development
- ◆ small business loans

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manage the disease that has been attacking many, but not all, of the clam farm sites. University of Florida Marketing graduate students have completed a marketing report for the Association, which included trips by the students to China, Mexico and Spain. Furthermore, one of the Association members has established a seafood processing plant which has made it unnecessary for the Association to pursue the creation of such a facility.

Recently, Council staff met with the leadership of the Association and discussed the current status of the program. Given the events and conditions described above, the Association has agreed that they should re-focus their efforts. To that end, assuming that the disease problem will be controlled, that the processing plant will continue to function properly, and that the identified markets will develop, future efforts will be to concentrate on increasing and sustaining production, and to maintain constant contact with developed customers. To do this, the following steps are to be taken:

- Because of structural problems that have been identified, the clam nursery must be modified to increase pumping capacity and the intake must be relocated to an area with a more acceptable source of saltwater, both improvements which are needed to maintain the production of 20,000,000 to 25,000,000 clams per year.

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WEB PAGES OF INTEREST

North Central Florida Regional Planning Council - <http://ncfrpc.org>

The Original Florida - <http://originalflorida.org>

North Central Florida Economic Development Partnership - <http://originalfloridabusines.org>

North Central Florida Local Emergency Planning Committee <http://www.ncflepc.org>

North Central Florida Areawide Development Co., Inc. - <http://adco.org>

I-75 Corridor Council - <http://www.i75floridagateway.com> or <http://www.i75project.com>

Scenic U.S. 441 - <http://www.scenicus441.com>

THE ORIGINAL FLORIDA GOES TO LONDON

World Travel Market 2001 closed its doors on November 15. Hundreds of thousands attended the 22nd World Travel Market where a total of 4,843 exhibitors from 171 countries participated in the travel show at Earl's Court in London. World Travel Market is the United Kingdom's largest annual travel trade show. With a captive audience, World Travel Market provides an unrivaled opportunity to target key industry professionals efficiently and cost effectively.

With financial assistance from a **VISIT FLORIDA** grant, Roland Loog, Director, Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau, and W. D. Higginbotham, Director of Economic Development, North Central Florida Regional Planning Council represented **The Original Florida Tourism Task Force** at the show. The two brought displays and brochures on the North Central Florida region to the show.

"The purpose was to get some exposure to the travel professional who absolutely knows nothing about our region, Natural North Florida" said Loog. "The trade fair showed me how little the travel professional knows about our region and how great the challenge is."

"Three things were accomplished," Loog said. "We learned how better to reach the European market; also a database for European travel professionals was created, and the show presented opportunities to tell about the region."

"The world market for this region is for travelers with three or four previous visits to

Florida. That's when people are looking to try something different," he said. "And they haven't done our thing."

Higginbotham said they spoke with many travel professionals who arrange group tours. "When we talked about **The Original Florida's** heritage and nature based activities such as the springs and rivers, they were pleasantly surprised. I think we will generate visitors to our region because of this trip."

Higginbotham and Loog traveled in December to the Orlando and Sanford airports to look at opportunities to showcase **The Original Florida**. They expect to recommend to the Tourism Task Force that the region establish a presence there, perhaps on a trial basis.

He said many European tourists, especially those coming into Sanford on chartered flights, rent vehicles. In fact, Sanford is the number one and number two Florida rental location for two of the major car rental companies.

"European visitors are typically here for two weeks or more, and after they spend a week with the attractions in Orlando, they will look for other things to do," Higginbotham said. "And they are only two hours from us." *Marj Hauptman, Alachua County VCB contributed to this article*



Roland Loog at the World Travel Market in London, England.

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- Retain a part-time, capable individual on a regular basis to maintain the nursery, instead of relying on Association members to undertake this task as volunteers.
- Provide a means for the Association to buy clam seeds in bulk for nursing (presently individual farmers are buying seed) in order to secure a reasonable price (some \$4,500 per million seeds) and also to insure that such seed are always available. The nursed seeds will then be made available to Association members at a reasonable price, but with sufficient profit to continually operate the nursery. And, because of the financial position of most farmers, the seeds will be loaned to them and be paid for after harvest, which will in effect, establish a revolving loan fund to maintain this process.

It is felt that this approach will help the farmers and the Association to become self-sustaining. To successfully reach these goals, the Regional Planning Council will enter into an agreement with the Association to provide funds for these activities, and also to provide funds for the development of a web page which will help maintain contact with customers, and provide printed material in English and Spanish as a means of communicating with potential customers in Mexico and Spain, as well as in the United States. Furthermore, Council staff will continue to support this effort to help ensure that the change in direction of the program is successful.

Inquiries regarding the Coastal Program may be directed to **W.D. Higginbotham, Jr., Director of Economic Development** at **(352) 955-2200, ext. 106**, or higginbotham@ncfrpc.org.