

## State of Florida approves Adams Ranch easement purchase

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Posted November 9, 2010 at 10:03 a.m., updated November 9, 2010 at 10:03 a.m.

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CARLTON WARD, JR.

Founded in 1937, Adams Ranch covers about 50,000 acres in four counties. In 2010, the 782-acre easement in Osceola County was another addition to their many initiatives of outstanding environmental stewardship for the land. The easement is an awe-inspiring mosaic of oak hammock, open pine flatwoods, wet prairies, freshwater marshes, streams and palmetto prairies.

**FORT PIERCE** — Nearly 75 years of outstanding land stewardship at the Adams Ranch made the State of Florida's recent approval of the purchase of 782 acres of the Adams Ranch in Osceola County for a conservation easement an easy decision.

Last year, as part of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Rural and Family Lands Protection (RFLP) Program, the Adams Ranch submitted a total of 8,000 acres of land to be considered for the conservation easement program.

Florida Forever, Florida's premier conservation and recreation lands acquisition program, had recently included some of this same acreage in its "Top Ten" list of agricultural lands at-risk of being lost forever if the state did not approve the purchase.

“The close ties of the Adams Ranch folks to the land and the cattle ranching industry are much appreciated by conservationists all across Florida,” said Richard Hilsenbeck, Director of Conservation Projects for The Nature Conservancy. “The conservation ethic exhibited by the Adams Ranch, coupled with the leadership of Agricultural Commissioner Charles Bronson and the Division of Forestry in promoting the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, is of paramount importance in preserving Florida's ranching heritage, culture and agricultural traditions,” Hilsenbeck added.

While Florida Forever served as the initial funding source for RFLP Program in 2008, it has been unable to provide any additional funding since then, causing rigid budgetary constraints on the conservation easements that have been approved.

There has been much interest in the RFLP program, with approximately 35 prospective projects submitted at the same time as the Adams Ranch lands. All of the submittals were reviewed and rated based on a variety of criteria, with the Adams Ranch easement ranking in the top four. The state determined that without the funding to buy the entire 8,000 acres, 782 of the most critical acres of Adams Ranch should be purchased for conservation at this time due to its significant environmental value.

FDACS Commissioner Charles H. Bronson commented that this purchase serves as a model project because the landowners will continue to contribute to the economy by “keeping agriculture lands in production, providing additional environmental safeguards and preserving Florida’s open space while keeping the lands on the tax roll.”

“The family is pursuing these easements because they want to see the land continue to produce cattle, provide jobs, and pay taxes,” Bronson said. “Four generations of Adams have walked this land and cared for this land. They’ve won numerous agriculture as well as environmental awards for their exemplary operations and best management practices. These folks are truly great stewards of the land,” Bronson added.

The Adams Ranch is a fourth-generation cattle ranch that focuses on total ranch management. Alto Adams Sr. purchased a tract of grassland in 1937 and incorporated it nearly 26 years later. Nearly 75 years later, the Adams Ranch now owns 50,000 acres of land in St. Lucie, Okeechobee and Osceola Counties.

“It is not enough for us to just do a good job breeding and caring for cattle. We must have a more holistic approach that keeps man, cattle, wildlife, and the land in a relationship that is profitable, productive and can be continued indefinitely,” Alto “Bud” Adams Jr. said. “This is the first easement for land conservation that Adams Ranch has been a part of, and we look forward to the continuation of this program so that all of the land that was submitted will be protected in perpetuity.”

For more information about the conservation easement or Adams Ranch, visit <http://www.adamsranch.com> or contact Lee Ann Adams at (772) 461-6321.

#### About Adams Ranch

Founded in 1937, Adams Ranch is a fourth-generation cattle business operating in St. Lucie, Okeechobee and Osceola Counties, headquartered in Fort Pierce, Florida. As developers of the Braford breed of cattle, Adams Ranch is today the 15th largest cow-calf ranch in the United States and was named the Ranch of the Century by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association in 1999.

Adams Ranch is dedicated to adapting the cattle to fit the land, the climate, the insects and the feed that is produced on it to generate a program of total ranch management.

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Originally posted at <http://www.tcpalm.com/news/2010/nov/09/state-of-florida-approves-adams-ranch-easement-pur/>