

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

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

Prepared By: Agriculture Committee

BILL: CS/SB 1212

SPONSOR: Agriculture Committee

SUBJECT: Open Government Sunset Review/Agricultural Records

DATE: February 8, 2006

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	_____ Poole	_____ Poole	_____	Fav/CS
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

This Committee Substitute reenacts s.403.067(7)(c)5, F.S., to continue the public records exemption for certain agricultural records which are reported to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) by agricultural producers for the purpose of implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) through voluntarily participating in a Best Management Practices (BMP) Program. The exemption of those records is also maintained when they are shared from the DACS to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) or a water management district.

This Committee Substitute substantially amends section 403.067 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Florida Public Records Law - Florida has a long history of providing public access to the records of governmental and other public entities. The Legislature enacted its first law affording access to public records in 1892. In 1992, the electors of Florida approved an amendment to the State Constitution which raised the statutory right of access to public records to a constitutional level. Section 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution provides:

Every person has the right to inspect or copy any public record made or received in connection with the official business of any public body, officer, or employee of the state, or persons acting on their behalf, except with respect to records exempted pursuant to this section or specifically made confidential by this Constitution. This section specifically includes the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government and each agency or department created

thereunder; counties, municipalities, and districts; and each constitutional officer, board, and commission, or entity created pursuant to law or this Constitution.

The Public Records Law specifies conditions under which the public must be given access to governmental records. Section 119.07(1)(a), F.S., provides that every person who has custody of a public record must permit the record to be inspected and examined by any person, at any reasonable time, under reasonable conditions, and under supervision by the custodian of the public record. Unless specifically exempted, all agency records are to be available for public inspection.

Section 119.011(11), F.S., defines the term “public record” to include:

all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, films, sound recordings, data processing software, or other material, regardless of the physical form, characteristics, or means of transmission, made or received pursuant to law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any agency.

The Florida Supreme Court has interpreted this definition to encompass all materials made or received by an agency in connection with official business which are “intended to perpetuate, communicate, or formalize knowledge.” All such materials, regardless of whether they are in final form, are open for public inspection unless made exempt.

Only the Legislature is authorized to create exemptions to open government requirements. Exemptions must be created by general law and such law must specifically state the public necessity justifying the exemption. Further, the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. A bill enacting an exemption may not contain other substantive provisions, although it may contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.

Open Government Sunset Review Act - The Open Government Sunset Review Act establishes a review and repeal process for public records exemptions. In the fifth year after enactment of a new exemption or the substantial amendment of an existing exemption, the exemption is repealed on October 2, unless the Legislature reenacts the exemption. Each year, by June 1, the Division of Statutory Revision of the Joint Legislative Management Committee is required to certify to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives the language and statutory citation of each exemption scheduled for repeal the following year.

The act states that an exemption may be created, revised, or maintained only if: (1) it serves an identifiable public purpose; and (2) if the exemption is no broader than necessary to meet the public purpose it serves. An identifiable public purpose is served if the exemption meets one of three specified criteria and if the Legislature finds that the purpose is sufficiently compelling to override the strong public policy of open government and cannot be accomplished without the exemption. The three statutory criteria are if the exemption:

“[a]llows the state or its political subdivisions to effectively and efficiently administer a governmental program, which administration would be significantly impaired without the exemption.”

“[p]rotects information of a sensitive personal nature concerning individuals, the release of which information would be defamatory to such individuals or cause unwarranted damage to the good name or reputation of such individuals or would jeopardize the safety of such individuals.”

“[p]rotects information of a confidential nature concerning entities, including, but not limited to, a formula, pattern, device, combination of devices, or compilation of information which is used to protect or further a business advantage over those who do not know or use it, the disclosure of such information would injure the affected entity in the marketplace.”

Section 119.15(6)(a), F.S., requires, as part of the review process, the consideration of the following questions:

- What specific records or meetings are affected by the exemption?
- Whom does the exemption uniquely affect, as opposed to the general public?
- What is the identifiable public purpose or goal of the exemption?
- Can the information contained in the records or discussed in the meeting be readily obtained by alternative means? If so, how?
- Is the record or meeting protected by another exemption?
- Are there multiple exemptions for the same type of record or meeting that it would be appropriate to merge?

While the standards in the Open Government Sunset Review Act appear to limit the Legislature in the process of review of exemptions, one session of the Legislature cannot bind another. The Legislature is only limited in its review process by constitutional requirements. In other words, if an exemption does not explicitly meet the requirements of the act, but falls within constitutional requirements, the Legislature cannot be bound by the terms of the Open Government Sunset Review Act. Further, s. 119.15(8), F.S., makes explicit that:

... notwithstanding s. 768.28 or any other law, neither the state or its political subdivisions nor any other public body shall be made party to any suit in any court or incur any liability for the repeal or revival and reenactment of any exemption under this section. The failure of the Legislature to comply strictly with this section does not invalidate an otherwise valid reenactment.

Under s. 119.10(1)(a), F.S., any public officer who violates any provision of the Public Records Act is guilty of a noncriminal infraction, punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500. Further, under paragraph (b) of that section, a public officer who knowingly violates the provisions of s. 119.07(1), F.S., relating to the right to inspect public records, commits a first degree misdemeanor, and is subject to suspension and removal from office or impeachment. Any person who willfully and knowingly violating any provision of the chapter is guilty of a first degree misdemeanor, punishable by potential imprisonment not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding \$1,000.

This exemption expires October 2, 2006, unless it is reviewed and reenacted by the Legislature.

Interim Project 2006-201: *Sunset Review of the Exemption for Agricultural Records* –

Senate staff reviewed the public records exemption in s. 403.067, F.S., pursuant to the Open Government Sunset Review Act and determined that the exemption meets the requirements for reenactment. Based on a survey and interviews, there is a reasonable basis to believe that release of the information contained in the exemption could jeopardize the effective administration of governmental programs by enabling agricultural records of an individual producer to become a public record. This information could include processes or methods of production, data relating to costs of production or profits, or other financial information. Release of this information could provide a competitor business with insight into the strategies and operation of those agricultural producers and potentially injure the producers in the market place. Additionally, a repeal of the exemption, would result in the reluctance of agricultural producers to provide information to the DACS pertaining to TMDLs and compliance with BMPs for risk of the information becoming public by doing so.

The overall consensus was that the exemption provides safeguards for agricultural producers and enables governmental staff to carry out their responsibilities more effectively.

Based on the findings of the Open Government Sunset Review, staff recommends that the Legislature retain the public records exemption for individual agricultural records relating to processes or methods of production, or relating to costs of production, profits, or other financial information which are otherwise not public records. This information is reported to the DACS for the purpose of implementation of TMDLs through BMPs or other suitable interim measures as contemplated under s. 403.067, F.S. It is also recommended that the public records exemption for those records be maintained when they have been furnished to the DEP or water management districts, at their request, to carry out the provisions of the section.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This Committee Substitute amends s. 403.067, F.S., to reenact the public records exemption for certain agricultural records which are reported to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACCS) by agricultural producers for the purpose of implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) through voluntarily participating in a Best Management Practices (BMP) Program. The exemption of those records is also maintained when they are shared from the DACCS to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) or a water management district..

The Committee Substitute provides for an effective date of October 1, 2006.

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

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

The Bill reenacts the public records exemption found in s. 403.067(7)(c)5., F.S.

Article I, s. 24 of the State Constitution, permits the Legislature to provide by general law for the exemption of records. A law that exempts a record must state with specificity the public necessity justifying the exemption and the exemption must be no broader than necessary to accomplish the stated purpose of the law. Additionally, a bill that contains an exemption may not contain other substantive provisions, although it may contain multiple exemptions that relate to one subject.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
