

**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 Agriculture

BILL: SB 864  
 INTRODUCER: Senator Ausley  
 SUBJECT: Cost-share Program for Agriculture, Shellfish Aquaculture, and Timber Operations  
 DATE: December 1, 2021      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Fink	Becker	AG	<b>Favorable</b>
2.			AEG	
3.			AP	

**I. Summary:**

SB 864 creates a cost-share program for agriculture, shellfish aquaculture, and timber operations within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (department). Furthermore, it requires the department (in consultation with Florida Sea Grant, University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida Shellfish Aquaculture Research and Extension Program, the Wakulla Environmental Institute, and the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University College of Agriculture and Food Sciences) to:

- Conduct a study to determine the value of environmental services, such as water recharge, stormwater filtration, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, nutrient remediation, coastal resilience and flood protection, and air quality benefits, provided by the agriculture, shellfish aquaculture, and timber industries;
- Promote the cost-share program, with priority going to low-income communities, historically under resourced communities of color, and rural communities impacted by Hurricane Michael in 2018;
- Update all relevant brochures, websites, and marketing materials to provide information on participation in the cost share program; and
- Adopt rules to implement this section.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2022.

**II. Present Situation:**

Collectively, the agriculture, natural resources, and food industries are significant contributors to the economy of the state of Florida, so maintaining healthy and sustainable agricultural and timber industries is vital. Florida has 17.16 million acres (26,807 square miles) of forestland, representing 50 percent of the state’s total land area, with nearly two-thirds of forestlands

privately owned. In 2016, the forest industry sectors directly employed 36,055 persons (fulltime and part-time jobs) and collected \$12.55 billion in industry revenues.<sup>1</sup>

In 2017, Florida had 47,000 commercial farms, using a total of 9.45 million acres. Florida ranked first in the United States in value of production of cucumbers, grapefruit, oranges, squash, sugarcane, fresh market snap beans, and fresh market tomatoes. The state ranked second in value of production of bell peppers, strawberries, watermelons, fresh market cabbage and fresh market sweet corn. Florida also ranked fourth nationally in the value of production of peanuts. Florida ranks 18th among all states in number of farms and 29th in land in farms. Farm cash receipts from marketing agricultural products in 2017 amounted to \$7.467 billion, a decrease of \$290 million from 2016. Nationally, Florida ranks fourth in the value of vegetable and melon cash receipts at \$1.194 billion, 11th in crop cash receipts with a value of \$6.08 billion, and 18th in total cash receipts.<sup>2</sup>

Shellfish can help restore ocean health. They are efficient water filterers and natural buffers for coastal communities. An adult oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water daily, removing excess nutrients and other pollutants in coastal waters, often caused by runoff. The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) and Florida Sea Grant are already working to quantify the environmental benefits of shellfish aquaculture, so that shellfish growers can be compensated for the benefit they provide.<sup>3</sup>

The federal Farm Bill currently provides some similar programs for farmers and landowners, which encourage and incentivize environmental stewardship. Programs like the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) provide technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and ranchers who voluntarily install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land to protect soil, water, air quality, and/or wildlife habitat.<sup>4</sup>

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

SB 864 creates s. 570.891, F.S., to create the act cited as the “Protecting Florida’s Natural Resources Act.”

The bill establishes the following Legislative findings:

- Maintaining healthy and sustainable agriculture, shellfish aquaculture, and timber industries is vital to this state’s economy, environment, and natural resources, including making significant environmental contributions to water quality and quantity, air purification, carbon sequestration, coastal resilience, and habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species;

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<sup>1</sup> University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, “Economic Contributions of the Forest Industry and Forest-based Recreation in Florida in 2016,” See [https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FE1051#FOOTNOTE\\_1](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FE1051#FOOTNOTE_1) / (Last visited November 23, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, “Florida Agriculture Overview and Statistics,” See <https://www.fdaacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Florida-Agriculture-Overview-and-Statistics> (Last visited November 23, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Lourdes Mederos, “UF/IFAS Boosting Florida's shellfish aquaculture industry, water quality initiatives”, South Dade Newsleader (Nov. 3, 2021), [http://www.southdadenewsleader.com/news/uf-ifas-boosting-floridas-shellfish-aquaculture-industry-water-quality-initiatives/article\\_a35ee2d2-4ba5-11ec-80a6-676e251c69ab.html](http://www.southdadenewsleader.com/news/uf-ifas-boosting-floridas-shellfish-aquaculture-industry-water-quality-initiatives/article_a35ee2d2-4ba5-11ec-80a6-676e251c69ab.html).

<sup>4</sup> University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, “Cost Share Programs for Florida’s Agricultural Producers and Landowners,” See <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/SS485>.

- The continued expansion of urban and coastal areas has increased pressure on the agriculture and timber industries, and in recent years there has been a significant decrease in agricultural and timber acreage;
- Water quality and quantity problems in this state's coastal waters have harmed the aquaculture industry, specifically shellfish farming. Filter feeder shellfish, such as oysters, hard clams, and sunray venus clams, are beneficial to this state's imperiled seagrass; and
- To ensure healthy and sustainable agriculture, shellfish aquaculture, and timber industries, a cost-share program is necessary to provide incentives to the owners within these industries to continue activities that are beneficial to water quality and quantity, air purification, carbon sequestration, nutrient remediation, coastal resilience, and habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species.

The bill also establishes a cost share program within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (department) which shall reimburse the owners of agriculture, shellfish aquaculture, and timber operations for up to 75 percent of the value of the environmental resources and services provided by such industries.

Additionally, the bill requires the department to:

- Conduct a study, in consultation with the Florida Sea Grant and the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences to determine the value of environmental services, such as water recharge, stormwater filtration, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, nutrient remediation, coastal resilience and flood protection, and air quality benefits, provided by the agriculture, shellfish aquaculture, and timber industries;
- Promote the cost-share program, in cooperation with University of Florida Shellfish Aquaculture Research and Extension Program, the Wakulla Environmental Institute, and the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University College of Agriculture and Food Sciences, and prioritize distribution of assistance to low-income communities, historically under resourced communities of color, and rural communities impacted by Hurricane Michael in 2018;
- Update all relevant brochures, websites, and marketing materials to provide information on participation in the cost share program; and
- Adopt rules to implement this section.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2022.

#### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

##### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

None.

##### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Indeterminate.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The cost-share program is subject to legislative appropriation, as there is no appropriation for the program in the bill. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer services could incur costs to complete the required study and promotion of the program.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 570.891 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:**

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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