

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 178

INTRODUCER: Senator Rouson

SUBJECT: Agronomic Study on Emerging Crops

DATE: March 10, 2025

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Burse	Becker	AG	Favorable
2.			AEG	
3.			FP	

I. Summary:

SB 178 directs Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), subject to appropriation, to conduct an agronomic study on emerging agricultural crops and determine whether there exists one or more viable crops or products that would provide economic benefit to growers using current agricultural infrastructure on land that has been taken out of production due to the effects of diseases and adverse weather conditions.

The bill also requires FAMU, by December 1, 2025, to submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The bill shall take effect July 1, 2025.

II. Present Situation:

Florida Agriculture

Florida's 44,400 farms and ranches utilize 9.7 million acres and continue to produce a wide variety of safe and dependable food products.¹ Agricultural land (cropland and rangeland) and forest land make up nearly two-thirds of the state's land area.² There are an estimated 200-300 commodities produced and some form of agriculture in all 67 counties.³ Florida's agriculture, natural resources, and food industries supported 2.4 million fulltime and part-time jobs

¹ FDACS, Florida Agriculture Overview and Statistics, available at <https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Florida-Agriculture-Overview-and-Statistics> (last visited March 5, 2025).

² IFAS, Florida's Agriculture and Natural Resource Facts, available at <https://ifas.ufl.edu/media/ifasufledu/ifas-dark-blue/docs/pdf/impact/FloridaAgFactsFactsheet.2020.Prt.pdf> (last visited March 5, 2025).

³ IFAS, Florida's Agriculture and Food System Fast Facts 2021, available at <https://branding.ifas.ufl.edu/downloads/uploads/Extension%20Brochures/IFAS/Florida-Agriculture-Food-System-Fast-Facts.pdf> (last visited March 5, 2025).

throughout Florida's economy (14.2% of all jobs in the state), contributing \$149.6 billion to gross state product in 2018.⁴

In 2021, Florida ranked first in the United States in total floriculture sales and in the value of production for sweetcorn, foliage plants for indoor use, Valencia oranges, sugarcane, fresh market tomatoes, and watermelons. Florida ranked second nationally in the value of production for bell peppers, grapefruit, all oranges, strawberries, and non-Valencia oranges. The state ranked fourth in cabbage, cantaloupe and peanuts.⁵ The state also ranked 1st in ornamental fish, 2nd in alligators, and 3rd in horses and ponies in the United States.⁶

Challenges Facing Florida Agriculture

Florida Citrus

Huanglongbing (HLB), also known as citrus greening or yellow dragon disease, is one of the most serious citrus diseases in the world and a significant issue facing Florida's citrus industry. HLB is a bacterial disease widespread in Asia, Africa and the Saudi Arabian that attacks the vascular system of plants. Once infected, there is no cure for the disease, and in areas where the disease is endemic, citrus trees decline and die within a few years.⁷

The HLB bacteria is transmitted primarily by insect vectors (citrus psyllids) but can also be spread through plant grafting and movement of infected plant material. Even though the pathogens are bacteria, the disease does not spread by casual contamination of personnel and tools or by wind and rain.⁸

Florida's citrus industry continues to decline due to the ongoing effects of citrus greening, competition with foreign markets, and other environmental factors. During the 2022-2023 season, Florida produced 28 million boxes of all types of oranges.⁹ The forecast for the 2024-2025 season is 12 million boxes.¹⁰ For reference, in the 2007-2008 season Florida produced 170 million boxes of oranges.¹¹

⁴ IFAS, Florida's Agriculture and Natural Resource Facts, available at <https://ifas.ufl.edu/media/ifasufledu/ifas-dark-blue/docs/pdf/impact/FloridaAgFactsFactsheet.2020.Prt.pdf> (last visited March 5, 2025).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ FDACS, Huanglongbing (HLB)/Citrus Greening Disease Information, available at <https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Pests-and-Diseases/Plant-Pests-and-Diseases/Citrus-Health-Response-Program/Citrus-Pests-and-Diseases/HLB-Citrus-Greening> (last visited March 5, 2025).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ United States Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services National Agricultural Statistics Service October 2022 Citrus Forecast, available at https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Florida/Publications/Citrus/Citrus_Forecast/2022-23/cit1022.pdf

¹⁰ United States Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services National Agricultural Statistics Service January 2025 Citrus Forecast, available at https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Florida/Publications/Citrus/Citrus_Forecast/2024-25/cit0125.pdf

¹¹ United States Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services National Agricultural Statistics Service June 2009 Citrus Forecast, available at https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Florida/Publications/Citrus/Citrus_Forecast/2008-09/cit0609.pdf

2024 Hurricanes

The 2024 hurricane season saw three hurricanes make landfall in Florida, all of which had a significant impact on agricultural lands. Hurricane Debby, which made landfall on August 5, 2024 as a Category 1 hurricane, resulted in agricultural losses estimated at \$170 million. Hurricane Helene, which made landfall on September 26, 2024 as a Category 4 hurricane, resulted in agricultural losses estimated between \$40.3 and \$162.2 million. Hurricane Milton, which made landfall on October 9, 2024 as a Category 3 hurricane, resulted in agricultural losses estimated between \$190.4 and \$642.7 million. In total, cumulative agricultural production losses in Florida for the 2024 hurricane season are estimated to be between \$402.3 million and \$975.8 million.¹²

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 directs Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), subject to appropriation, to conduct an agronomic study on emerging agricultural crops and determine whether there exists one or more viable crops or products that would provide economic benefit to growers using current agricultural infrastructure on land that has been taken out of production due to the effects of diseases and adverse weather conditions.

The bill also directs FAMU, by December 1, 2025, to submit a report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives that includes the following:

- Information about each crop or product considered, detailing the environmental impact;
- An assessment of each crop's suitability to Florida's climate, and the expected economic benefit to Florida growers and communities; and
- Recommendations for best practices to sustain and improve Florida's agricultural industry.

Section 2 provides that the bill shall take effect July 1, 2025.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

¹² Presentation by Dr. Christa D. Court, Associate Professor at the University of Florida, to the Senate Agriculture Committee on January 14, 2025. On file with the Senate Agriculture Committee.

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:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill creates an unnumbered section of Florida law.

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.