



Program should encourage abandoned grove removal

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Vicky Boyd

Landowners with abandoned citrus groves may be hesitant to remove the trees for fear they'll lose their agricultural lands classification and the tax advantages that go with them.

Several grower groups have worked with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to develop a program that encourages removal of abandoned groves to reduce Asian citrus psyllids and citrus greening issues, according to a grower newsletter.

Statutes 193.461 will allow lands to continue to be classified as agricultural if they were taken out of production because of state or federal eradication or quarantine programs.

g Lands that are fallow or converted to non-income producing uses would continue to be classified as agricultural for the duration of the state or federal programs, or their successor programs.

They would be assessed at no more than \$50 per acre per year.

But if the land is converted to income-producing agricultural uses, it would be assessed as any other income-producing ag land is.

If the land is converted to non-agricultural uses, it would be assessed under Statute 193.011.

To participate in the abandoned grove initiative, growers have to agree to voluntarily destroy the trees at their own expense.

Before removing the trees, they must notify an FDACS inspector, who examines the property, writes a destruction report and issues an Abandoned Grove Compliance Agreement.

The landowner can then take the compliance agreement to the county property appraiser and receive a greenbelt tax rate for at least two years.

Local property appraisers may have additional requirements, so check with them before starting the tree-removal process.

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