

## Resolution for Environmental Justice in Western Palm Beach County

**Whereas**, the discriminatory nature of the sugarcane burning rules is a glaring example of environmental injustice and environmental racism in Palm Beach County;

**Whereas**, current sugarcane burning regulations under the authority of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and enforced by the Florida Forest Service, based on wind direction and speed, prioritize the protection of more affluent communities in Eastern Palm Beach County, while the predominantly lower-income African American and Latinx communities in the Glades do not receive equal protection;

**Whereas**, the discriminatory wind speed and direction based sugarcane burning rules were put in place in 1991 after public outcry from residents in Eastern Palm Beach County, particularly residents from the town of Wellington, without the need of further research and data;

**Whereas**, despite public outcry from the Glades residents, FDACS has failed to modify the current sugarcane burning rules in a manner that provides equal protection from sugarcane burning pollution for residents of the Glades, who are the most impacted by pre-harvest sugar field burning pollution;

**Whereas**, annual pre-harvest sugar field burning in Palm Beach County lasting from October to as long as May produces more emissions from agricultural fires than any other County in the United States;

**Whereas**, the hazardous, industrial-scale, open burning practice releases toxic air pollutants including Particulate Matter (PM 2.5 and PM 10), Benzene, Acetaldehyde, Formaldehyde, Ammonia, and more;

**Whereas**, research from Florida International University confirms that during the sugarcane harvesting season in and around Belle Glade, the concentrations of carcinogenic Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAH) associated with PM10 were up to 15 times higher than those measured during the summer growing season;

**Whereas**, Stanford University's Environmental Change and Human Outcomes Lab has documented that zip codes within the Glades communities of Western Palm Beach County record the worst smoke days stemming from seasonal pre-harvest sugar field burning in the entire country;

**Whereas**, despite recent updates to the singular state-run air quality monitor in Belle Glade, independent air quality monitoring and investigative reporting has shown it is still ill-equipped to capture the real-time short term spikes in air pollution produced by pre-harvest sugar field burning Glades community residents are exposed to during the annual harvest season;

**Whereas**, research confirms exposure to pollution from pre-harvest sugar field burning is linked to respiratory disease (asthma, bronchitis, and COPD), cancer, kidney disease, cardiac disease, neurological disease, higher rates of preterm births, low birth weights, and infant mortality rates;

**Whereas**, research confirms that both children and the elderly are the most vulnerable to suffering negative health impacts from exposure to pre-harvest sugar field burning pollutants;

**Whereas**, in acknowledgment of the health risks posed to those with or recovering from COVID-19 exposed to pollution from open burning pollution, the CDC has recommended the use of alternative methods of disposal of vegetative matter;

**Whereas**, Health records have documented a 35% uptick in hospital admissions for Belle Glade residents during the pre-harvest sugar field burning season versus the summer growing season;

**Whereas**, Research from Florida State University estimates between at least 1 and 6 people die each year as a result of sugarcane burning emissions in South Florida.;

**Whereas**, in addition to the air quality issues surrounding sugar cane burning, there are other environmental harms, such as Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, water pollution through atmospheric deposition, and negative wildlife impacts;

**Whereas**, economic impacts include property damage, clean up costs for persistent ashfall in impacted communities, a dis-incentive for outside investment, tourism, and new businesses to set up shop in the Glades communities due to ash related maintenance costs, and health care costs for residents with health issues exacerbated during the harvesting season;

**Whereas**, our stand for values of equity and inclusion demands that we take action against the assault on black lives that occurs every time they have to breathe in the ash of sugar burning;

**Whereas**, the burn-free alternative to pre-harvest sugar field burning, called “green harvesting,” is a method Florida sugar growers already regularly practice, when burn permits are denied, using the same modern mechanical harvesters utilized on burned fields;

**Whereas**, sugarcane growing nations around the world such as Brazil, Australia, Thailand, India, and Zimbabwe have been phasing out sugarcane burning and switching to burn-free green harvesting;

**Whereas**, the sugar-growing state of Louisiana green harvests up to 65% of their sugarcane;

**Whereas**, green harvesting is required for all USDA Certified Organic sugarcane, including the organic sugarcane produced by Florida Crystals;

**Whereas**, where green harvesting is practiced, sugarcane trash (leaves and tops of the sugarcane plant) is either left on the soil to be used as mulch, or is separated and collected to be utilized along with bagasse (the waste product left over after sugarcane refining) to produce electricity, biofuels, biochar, tree-free paper products, cattle feed, disintegrant for medicine, and more;

**Whereas**, green harvesting and mulching the sugarcane trash has been found to reduce soil subsidence, increase carbon sequestration, and improve overall soil health;

**Whereas**, in addition to eliminating the public health threat caused by pre-harvest sugar field burning, the alternative of green harvesting can help mitigate climate change and create new jobs and economic opportunities in the Everglades Agricultural Area;

**Whereas**, determinations based on the Florida Forest Service’s Satellite burn tracking map indicate that harmful ash plumes can extend as far as 26 miles from the source of the burn; and

**Whereas**, since November 2019, Glades community residents have been calling for a 27-30 mile buffer zone between schools, homes, and businesses and pre-harvest sugar cane field burning as the first phase of an eventual full ban on pre-harvest burning;

**Therefore be it resolved** that the Palm Beach County Democratic Party Executive Committee: Calls upon the Commissioner of Agriculture, Nikki Fried, to use her position’s authority over sugarcane burning to implement a minimum 27-mile radius burn-free buffer zone around communities impacted by pre-harvest sugar field burning as a first step toward the eventual end of pre-harvest sugar field burning; and

**Be it further resolved** that the Palm Beach County Democratic Party Executive Committee: Implores the sugar industry to immediately begin the swift transition to sustainable, burn-free green harvesting.