

Duette might get UF site

Proposed site

NICK MASON
Herald Staff Writer

regional center site selection committee. It is supported by county commission staff with the understanding that steps would be taken to avoid pollution discharges on the site that is within the Lake Manatee watershed, which provides drinking water to about 300,000 people in Manatee and Sarasota counties.

"This really is a request coming from the agricultural community to the board of county commissioners to help find a suitable, practical and, I might underscore, environmentally sound site for relocating the center," said Charlie Hunsicker, the county's ecosystems administrator. "The county, in turn, is willing to work with our own community to see if such a site can be made available with environmental protections in place for protecting the integrity of lands in the watershed."

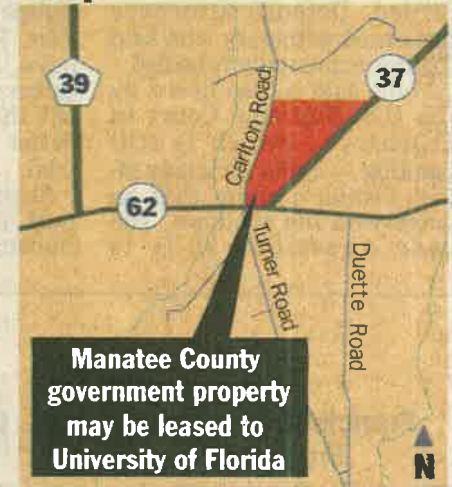
The proposed site is part of the

23,000-acre county park, but it is within a 500-acre section north of State Road 62 that is not used for recreation, Hunsicker said. The site was improved pasture before the county bought it, and has access from Carlton Road.

University officials are looking for 50 to 100 cultivated acres and 200 to 300 additional acres for a series of buildings and perimeter buffer, according to background documents provided county commissioners. The buildings would have about 140,000 square feet of space for offices, a laboratory, a greenhouse/shadehouse, storage and equipment.

A regional center could house about 100 faculty and staff, which would make it the largest employer in Duette, a rural spot about 35 miles northeast of Bradenton that is perhaps best known for its one-room school.

Talk of a regional agricultural



MERRY ECCLES/The Herald

center surfaced after university leaders threatened last year to close existing centers, including the Bradenton one, to save money. Local farmers and

DUETTE TO 3C

DUETTE FROM 1C

growers objected long and hard and captured the potent backing of Florida Senate President John McKay, R-Bradenton, who blocked the university from closing the Bradenton facility.

"We've all had to put our heads together to make the dollars go further and approach this on a regional basis," said Mac Carraway, chief financial officer for Pacific Tomato Growers Ltd. of Palmetto and a member of the university's site selection committee.

"There is certainly good economic reason for the

county to consider this," Carraway said. "To the extent they could help establish this site, it maintains the long-standing research capability in this area that supports an agricultural economy that has tremendous impact on the economic well-being of Manatee County as a whole. It just makes good sense. This is a good business decision."

Carraway and Jay Taylor, president of Taylor & Fulton packinghouse in Palmetto and another member of the university's site selection committee, said they like the Duette site.

"It's hard for me to see why this wouldn't be a top contender under any

circumstances," Carraway said. "It fits the bill."

Taylor said if county commissioners are willing to offer a long-term lease, the site selection committee should focus on the Duette site and a similar property offered by Hillsborough County commissioners.

"The Duette site certainly has possibilities, as a does the property outside Wimauma," Taylor said. "I don't see a need to go beyond those two properties."

UF rejects Manatee for agricultural center

University of Florida agricultural research officials said Tuesday they will build a new research center in Hillsborough County, rather than in Manatee County.

The university's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences will locate its \$12 million center near Balm, south of Tampa. The site was selected over a slightly smaller plot near Duette.

Mike Martin, the university's vice president for agriculture and natural

resources, made the decision with input from a 12-member committee of farmers and faculty.

The center will conduct research on tomatoes, strawberries and ornamental and flowering plants, taking over the role of the facility at 5007 60th St. E. and research center near Plant City.

No time line for the new construction was immediately available.

FACILITY FROM 1C

testing. The Duette site is part of the 23,000-acre Duette Conservation Park, but is within a 500-acre section just north of State Road 62, near the Duette school.

Citrus was grown on parts of the 440-acre Hillsborough site.

Joyce wouldn't give any breakdowns on the vote. Six voters were from Manatee County and four from Hillsborough. Two voters were from Osceola and Hardee counties.

"Not completely," Joyce said when asked if the vote was based on strong support for members' home communities. "It wasn't all Manatee versus Hillsborough."

The new regional center could house 100 faculty and staff, which would make it

the largest employer in Duette, about 35 miles northeast of Bradenton.

"You know how I voted," said committee member Raymond Lee, who has been involved in agriculture in Manatee County for 51 years. "I think the ground in Duette is much fresher. I think the security at that site would be better ... I don't know what will happen Thursday. If someone wants to budge from their position, the tie will be broken. If not, Dr. Martin will call the shot."

Once a site is selected, the agricultural center in Bradenton, including frontage on State Road 70, will be put up for sale, Joyce said.

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Duette tied for science facility

A new UF agricultural research facility will replace the Gulf Coast center in Bradenton

RICHARD DYMOND
Herald Staff Writer

DUETTE — Twelve scientists, farmers and faculty chosen to recommend a site for a University of Florida regional agricultural center have voted 6-6 between Duette and a site in Hillsborough County.

If the site selection committee can't reach what chairman Joseph Joyce called "a solid recommendation" at a special tiebreaking meeting scheduled 1:30-3:30 p.m. Thursday in Ruskin, then Mike Martin, a university vice president in charge of all centers, will pick the site, Joyce said.

The new center — which will conduct research on tomatoes, ornamental plants and strawberries — would replace Bradenton's Gulf Coast Research and Education Center and a similar facility in Hillsborough.

Members of the recommendation committee submitted their ballots Friday after waiting roughly three months to vote for either Balm in southern Hillsborough or Duette because Balm was being tested for herbicides in the soil. Those tests came back negative last week, Joyce said.

"All analyses we did (in Balm), were below (herbicide) detection limits," Joyce said.

The Duette site is improved pasture land and didn't require soil