

Florida Case Studies Warn Against Permitting Wildflower Music Park

Connecting Melrose — Protecting Rural Alachua County

Florida's recent history shows that large entertainment venues built on rural or environmentally sensitive land lead to severe traffic, noise, and environmental impacts. These examples demonstrate why Alachua County's agricultural zoning code (§404.14.5) exists — and why large commercial festivals are incompatible with rural landscapes.

Rock the Country Festival — Ocala, Marion County (2025)

Held at Florida Horse Park (agricultural/equestrian use). Over 200 complaints of traffic gridlock and safety hazards were recorded. Local media reported backups and sheriff patrols diverted from rural zones.

Sources: *Ocala Star-Banner* (May 2025); *WCJB TV20*; *Ocala-News.com*; *352 Today*.

Okeechobee Music & Arts Festival — Okeechobee County (2016–Present)

Early permits issued on agricultural land led to flooding and wastewater lawsuits. County later required stricter storm-water and sanitation controls, confirming risks of large gatherings near waterways.

Sources: *Palm Beach Post* (Mar 7, 2016); *WPBF Channel 25* (Feb 27, 2017).

Ultra Music Festival — Virginia Key, Miami-Dade County (2019)

After noise disputes downtown, the event moved to Virginia Key near Biscayne Bay. A University of Miami study documented “sound stress in fish,” while residents reported congestion and pollution.

Sources: *Univ. of Miami Rosenstiel / NOAA* (PubMed 32563142); *Miami Herald*; *Miami Waterkeeper* (2019).

FloydFest — Patrick County, Virginia (Canceled 2023)

Promoted as a “model” for rural arts and culture, but canceled due to environmental permitting issues, runoff concerns, and inadequate infrastructure. Even experienced organizers overestimated rural site capacity.

Sources: *Roanoke Times* (Apr 2023); *Cardinal News* (Apr 2023); *Blue Ridge Public Radio* (May 2023).

Summary: These Florida and regional examples show what happens when large entertainment projects overrun rural capacity — traffic paralysis, environmental stress, and resident backlash. Alachua County's Comprehensive Plan and ULDC §404.14.5 prohibit commercial entertainment in agricultural zones for these reasons. Protecting our farmland and aquifer protects our community.

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