



Position Statement  
Golden Ocala/World Equestrian Center  
Zoning Requests in the Farmland Preservation Area

Horse Farms Forever opposes the requests from GO/WEC to use the WEC Rural Land Use inside the Farmland Preservation Area and to move the Urban Growth Boundary.

Horse Farms Forever is a strong supporter of all things equestrian, and especially the World Equestrian Center, as it promises to bring vitality to our horse industry and economy. This kind of growth, if managed well, will enhance our global brand as the Horse Capital of the World. We also thank Golden Ocala for being a Founding member of HFF.

Unfortunately, Golden Ocala/World Equestrian Center has proposed two changes to Marion County's Comprehensive Plan that we must oppose. These requests threaten the integrity of the Farmland Preservation Area, which is core to our mission. The Farmland Preservation Area was created in 2005 by the Marion County Commission to protect the land for agriculture and the vibrant horse industry, which contributes over \$2.6 billion to the county's economy and employs more than 20,000 people.

GO-WEC is requesting two significant changes to their Development of Regional Impact (DRI) to accommodate more commercial and residential development within the FPA. One request will create a new zoning category called WEC Rural to allow intensive commercial development. The second request is to move the Urban Growth Boundary on several parcels that are not adjacent to the WEC.

**New Zoning Category: WEC Rural**

Although the name is WEC Rural it is not rural - its intensive commercial use. This is like a Trojan horse, and will be devastating to the Farmland Preservation Area by setting a precedent for future commercial zoning and land use decisions. There will be unintended, negative consequences to allowing this zoning classification inside the FPA.

The WEC Rural zoning would apply to land located west of NW 100<sup>th</sup> Street and inside the FPA. These parcels are not located adjacent to the main areas of WEC, which already has significant commercial acreage. While limited commercial use is allowed in the Farmland Preservation Area, only in designated Rural Activity Centers (RAC) or with a Special Use Permit. The WEC Rural zoning allows GO-WEC to create its own Rural Activity Center. The WEC Rural parcels cannot be designated as a RAC because they are not located at a cross-roads intersection. However, WEC is requesting that the WEC Rural zoning allow the same amount, or higher, of commercial use as a RAC, which allows a density range of a maximum Floor Area Ratio of 0.35, as further defined by the county's Land Development Code.

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There are several existing RAC's in the Farmland Preservation Area and they can extend no greater than one-quarter mile from the center of the RAC for a maximum of 96 acres. One example in the Farmland Preservation Area is Gilbert's Hardware and the surrounding gas stations and feed stores.

For parcels that are not located in designated RACs, landowners may apply for a Special Use Permit (SPU) to allow for limited commercial development. The advantages of an SPU include more design guidelines by the county, and there can be set amount of time allowed for the commercial use, and the commercial use is not transferred to future owners.

For limited commercial activity on the proposed WEC Rural parcels inside the FPA, a Special Use Permit is the best option to allow limited commercial use and protect the integrity of the Farmland Preservation Area. The WEC Rural zoning inside the FPA is inconsistent with Marion County's comprehensive plan.

### **Moving the Boundary of the Farmland Preservation Area**

GO-WEC has requested to move the boundary of the Farmland Preservation Area on recently acquired acreage on Highway 225A that is not adjacent to the WEC. It's important to note that GO-WEC knew the parcels were located within the FPA when they were purchased.

This request is inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan, which states that the Farmland Preservation Area is "intended to encourage preservation of agriculture.... The County establishes this area as critical to the enhancement and preservation of its designation as the Horse Capital of the World." Objective 3.3: Farmland Preservation Area

Horse Farms Forever's mission is to preserve the character and culture that horses, horse farms and the Farmland Preservation Area make unique to Marion County ... as it grows. We support good growth for our community, but urban growth becomes urban sprawl when the comprehensive plan is subject to change with every developer request. The county's Farmland Preservation Area must be respected and protected.

The mission of Horse Farms Forever is to inspire conservation of horse farms through education, awareness and idea exchange so as to preserve the character and culture that horses and the Farmland Preservation Area make unique to Marion County. We are watchful of government and others to preserve and protect horse farms and farmland for future generations, especially in the Farmland Preservation Area. We are neither anti-growth nor anti-development, rather encouraging urban growth to remain inside the Urban Growth Boundary.

Horse Farms Forever is registered with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as a charitable organization and approved as a tax-exempt 501 (C) (3) corporation by the Internal Revenue Service. Horse Farms Forever does not have a political mission. Our status as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization does not allow us to participate or intervene in political activities. The organization will neither advocate on behalf of political candidates nor advocate for the passage of legislation.