

South
Florida

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South Florida Tomato and Vegetable Growers, Inc. Response to Criticisms by the National Park Service

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to factually refute National Park Service (NPS) statements and allegations concerning some of the most significant issues in dispute. NPS assertions addressed herein have been quoted verbatim from the various public statements made by representatives of the NPS over the past two months.

NPS:

"We believe this study ("The Impact of Evicting Farmers from the Hole-in-the-Donut") was designed with one object in mind, to support a preconceived conclusion that farming should continue. It is apparent that little regard was given to accuracy and reliability of field methodology."

S.F.T. & V.G. : (Campbell)

On looking for the most credible people we could find to develop a study on the environmental impact of farming in the Donut, I went first to the Florida Audubon Office in Orlando. They recommended that I retain Dr. George Cornwell (Ecoimpact Inc.) as the very best ecological consultant in the State and I was assured by them that his work would be accepted by conservationists as valid.

I next talked to Dr. John Gerber at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. He assured me that George Cornwell (Ecoimpact) would have been recommended by conservation groups. Information from agricultural leaders indicated George Cornwell was not favorable toward agriculture's position in many environmental matters and would be supportive to the conservationists views rather than to agriculture. I decided to go with Dr. George Cornwell and Ecoimpact against the advice of some of these agriculture leaders.

George Cornwell, when I first spoke to him, said I was to understand that the chips would have to fall where they may and if the study showed any significant adverse ecological damage to the Park, he would divorce himself of any further association with the program.

The study showed no significant adverse ecological damage to the Park. That is what the "Ecoimpact" study demonstrates and is in agreement with NPS's own studies.

"Everglades NP was authorized by Act of Congress in 1934 and since that date the public has been on notice that it was the intent of the United States to acquire all of the lands in the Hole-in-the-Donut for Park purposes."

"First, we would like to comment on the conditions of land purchase. Mr. Edward J. Campbell's letter of April 14, 1975, to Dr. George Cornwell, Ecoimpact, Inc., states that in 1958 Public Law 85-428 assured continuation of farming in the Hole-in-the-Donut area within the Park's perimeter. This statement is misleading. The Act provides that the lands would be acquired by the Federal Government only with the consent of the owner so long as the lands in question were used for farming purposes. The Act did not, however, provide for farming to continue in perpetuity. It must be stressed that the farm lands were purchased entirely through negotiations with land owners as provided in Public Law 85-482. It was never necessary to reply upon the (condemnation) provisions of the amendment of

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Public Law 91-428 passed in 1970. Further, it should be pointed out that much of the Hole-in-the-Donut lands had been acquired by the Federal Government prior to the passage of this amendment. Therefore, it appears that any charges concerning attempts by the Government to intimidate land owners into forced sales are false."

"We have also been advised by the Regional Solicitor of the Department of the Interior, Atlanta, Georgia, that in his opinion there is no legal authority for the National Park Service to agree to the proposal (grower's authority concept) and to do so would be contrary to the intent of Congress."

S.F.T. &V.G.:
(Campbell)

While there may have been, since 1934, public notice by NPS to acquire all inholdings, notice of the Donut farming phase-out was first publicly released with the 1970 amendment. All prior reference to Donut agriculture by NPS, Congress, and the State of Florida indicated the intent to retain this land use.

The threat of forthcoming condemnation and probable lowered selling value as the deadline approached vs. actual usage of condemnation authority motivated Donut land owners to sell involuntarily. Personal communication with farm land owners Wisenberg, Hayes, and others indicated they were afraid of lawsuits and they were advised by council to take whatever they could get and get out or be bled by long litigation.

There was no public interaction (indeed the public was never made adequately aware of the impending amendment ramifications) during the "surreptitious" 1970 amendment discussion and subsequent passage. There exists no record of a Congressional or NPS attempt to encourage the private sector to make a counter-presentation before the decision makers.

Congressional passage of the amendment was motivated solely by the unfounded "documentation" of damage to the Park ecosystem, with no input on the socio-economic importance of Donut farming.

There exist many statements on record by then Interior Secretary Wirth, Governor Collins, Attorney General Ervin and Senator Holland of Florida, and others, expressing the intent to retain agricultural land use in the Donut and the necessity to do so.

Mechanisms do exist for a cooperative, mutually beneficial settlement.

NPS:

"The issue which you are now confronted today in considering this resolution is not new. The National Park Service views it as a very basic issue concerning public land use policy. The issue is simply this: Should lands that were set aside and purchased with public funds as a National Park be used by a small special interest group for personal short-term gain, or should they be preserved in public ownership for the benefit and enjoyment of all American citizens and generations yet unborn."

S.F.T.&V.G.:

This overlooks abrogated protection of Donut farm lands insured even after NPS purchase - the only purchased inholding to be uniquely treated as per agreement with the State of Florida.

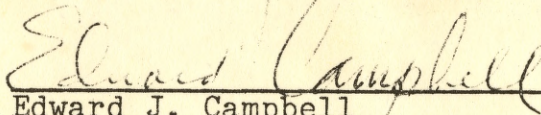
The farm lease payments, the fee per box harvested, and additional restoration monies to be collected by NPS from the Donut growers would offset NPS (public) purchase allocations for the Donut.

The NPS should provide insight as to how Donut farmland will contribute to public "benefit and enjoyment" now or in the near future. (It is not their plan to barricade

these lands from public access for the foreseeable future and accept the take-over of much of this land by the noxious exotic Brazilian Pepper?)

The situation is not simply a matter of deeding over a pristine wilderness inholding to NPS control. These newly-acquired Donut agricultural lands are furrowed, cleared of natural vegetation and extensively covered in noxious exotic plants wherever abandoned for more than a few years. Today's Donut is not National Park quality land and cannot be adequately restored to natural conditions for decades, and perhaps centuries, except possibly at enormous public expense. Given the Donut's demonstrated phenomenal agricultural production capability, the current uncertain economic and food situation, and the lack of federal monies available for costly special restoration programs, the highest and best use of this uncharacteristic park land is continued food crop production.

SOUTH FLORIDA TOMATO and
VEGETABLE GROWERS, INC.


Edward J. Campbell
Secretary/Treasurer