Producing Beef and Keeping Water Clean

According to the Pasco County Property Appraiser’s website, grazed pasture and range lands make up 56 % of the agricultural land in Pasco County. Beef cattle are the primary food commodity produced on these properties. These lands also comprise a majority of the water recharge area for the Tampa/St. Petersburg metropolitan area. While they informally follow good management for water quality principles, many ranches are not enrolled in the non-mandatory Best Management Practices (BMP’s) for Water Quality program offered by the Florida Department of Agriculture. In conjunction with the Florida Department of Agriculture, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida and Pasco Farm Bureau and the Pasco County Cattlemen’s Association, two Beef Cattle BMP for Water Quality programs have been offered during the past three years. Both classroom instruction and field demonstrations were utilized to teach principles of water quality management. Topics included: nutrient management, pest management, pharmaceutical handling, alternative water sources for cattle, prescribed grazing, erosion control, fence installation, conservation buffers, prescribed burning, water well protection and animal mortality. Over twelve thousand acres of Pasco County ranchlands are now enrolled in the BMP program as a result of this initiative. With an average annual rainfall of 52 inches and each acre of land receiving 27,154 gallons of water per inch of rain, approximately 16 billion gallons of water are being protected per year.

[Ed Jennings, Pasco County]