

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2023-1198

TITLE: Senate Resolution Advocating for Sustainable Alternatives to ‘Sugarcane Burning’

AUTHOR(S): Green Caucus Chairman Nathaniel Pelton

SPONSOR(S): Judiciary Chair Jonathan C. Stephens, Judiciary Vice-Chair Joaquin R. C. Marcelino, Senator Chalisa Budhai, Senator Hana Ali, Senator Matthew Reich, Senator Saketh Damara, Senator Laurie Wang

WHEREAS, the State of Florida currently leads the nation in sugarcane production, having harvested 15.8 million tons of sugarcane in 2017, accounting for 51% of the national sugarcane yield [1]; and,

WHEREAS, sugarcane production stands as a significant industry in Florida, providing employment to over 14,000 individuals and contributing an economic value exceeding \$800 million annually [2]; and,

WHEREAS, the practice of burning sugarcane crops before harvest—aimed at removing leaves and debris to expose the sugar-bearing stalk—remains an antiquated and unnecessary technique [3]; and,

WHEREAS, this practice involves the burning of approximately 10,000 sugarcane fields spanning 400,000 acres across Florida from October to March [4]; and,

WHEREAS, such burning activities give rise to the release of fine inhalable particles into the atmosphere known as Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM 2.5) [4] [5], which are directly associated with health complications including nonfatal heart attacks, irregular heartbeats, exacerbated asthma, diminished lung function, increased respiratory symptoms, airway irritation, breathing difficulties, and premature mortality among those with heart or lung conditions [6]; and,

WHEREAS, a 2022 study examining the effects of sugarcane burning in South Florida found that PM 2.5 levels were notably elevated during sugarcane harvest season compared to the rest of the year in regions where sugarcane burning is practiced [4]; and,

WHEREAS, the study also concluded that this practice contributes to an annual average of 0.4 deaths per 100,000 individuals in sugarcane-growing areas, resulting in an estimated 2.5 deaths per year across South Florida [4]; and,

WHEREAS, the heightened PM 2.5 concentrations from sugarcane burning disproportionately affect South Florida's non-white and lower-income residents, leading to an anticipated mortality rate that is tenfold greater than that among wealthier white residents [4]; and,

WHEREAS, contemporary alternatives like mechanical harvesting and green cane harvesting have proven to be both effective and environmentally friendly methods for gathering sugarcane [7]; and

WHEREAS, the State of Florida bears the responsibility to safeguard its natural resources, endorse sustainable agricultural practices, and protect the well-being of its residents; now,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate condemns the practice of sugarcane burning within the State of Florida due to its adverse environmental and health effects.

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate urges the Student Government Executive Branch, including the External Affairs Agency, to utilize all available resources in advocating for the gradual elimination of sugarcane burning on behalf of the student body to relevant local and state authorities.

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate calls upon local and state authorities to collaborate with pertinent stakeholders in devising a comprehensive plan for the phased discontinuation of sugarcane burning across the State of Florida.

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate strongly appeals to Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and the State Legislature to advocate for more stringent regulations and rigorous enforcement measures aimed at reducing and ultimately eradicating sugarcane burning.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to Student Body President Olivia Green, External Affairs Agency Head Hope Lerman, University of Florida Vice President of Government and Community Relations Mark Kaplan, University of Florida Director of Government Relations Chris Emmanuel, State of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Florida State Senate President Kathleen Passidomo, Florida State House Speaker Paul Renner, Florida State Senate Minority Leader Lauren Book, and Florida State House Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell.

[1]<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2019/10/15/agriculture-sunshine-state>

[2]<https://discover.pbcgov.org/coextension/agriculture/pages/sugarcane.aspx>

[3]<https://www.sierraclub.org/florida/sugar-field-burning>

[4]<https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP9957>

[5]<https://www.epa.gov/air-trends/particulate-matter-pm25-trends>

[6]<https://www.epa.gov/pm-pollution/health-and-environmental-effects-particulate-matter-pm>

[7]<https://stopsugarburning.org/green-harvesting-solution/#harvesting>

Oscar Santiago Perez 9/11/23
Senate President Date