

Wedgworth Leadership Institute
Class VIII Leadership Tracking Poll

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Introduction

The purpose of the WLI Class VIII Leadership Tracking Poll is to track industry leaders' perceptions of emerging and critical issues within the agriculture and natural resources sectors. Tracking opinion leaders' perceptions of issues will allow WLI and the PIE Center to:

- Document the agriculture and natural resource related issues opinion leaders believe to be most important to Florida
- Document industry leaders' attitudes and opinions over time
- Compare industry leaders' and consumers' attitudes and opinions
- Utilize collected information as a construct to positively affect policy decisions

The first Leadership Tracking Poll questionnaire sent out asked opinion leaders to self-report the five most important issues facing Florida's agriculture and natural resources' sectors. In addition to leaders reporting issues they felt were most important, they were also asked to report:

- Where they received information about each issue
- What they felt policy makers needed to know about each issue
- How likely the average citizen is to know about each issue
- With whom they share information about each issue
- What outcomes they predict from each issue

Methodology

This research utilized a modified Delphi technique that was analyzed via a quantitative content analysis. Using a small set of open ended questions, researchers counted the frequencies of the issues reported and categorized the issues into broader issues themes. Specifically, this research used an online questionnaire that was sent to Class VII members' email addresses. This questionnaire was distributed in February 2011 and received a 100% response rate from WLI Class VIII members.

Results

WLI Class VIII boasts 30 members. With all 30 members having the opportunity to list 5 issues, there was a potential for 150 various issues to be identified. However, some Class VIII members chose not to list 5 issues and a total of 144 issues were actually listed and identified. From the 144 issues, five issues were consistently identified by opinion leaders as being important to Florida agriculture and natural resources:

- Water
- Labor
- Regulation
- Food Safety/Food Regulation
- Land Use

As the issue of water overwhelmingly received the largest number of mentions, this report focuses only on the breakdown of the water results, the basis of which was presented at the March Class VIII seminar in Tallahassee. Additionally, the water issue demonstrates the pattern that all of the top five issues exhibited. All of the issues contained sub-categories and diverse messages and anticipated outcomes.

This report serves as an in-depth look into WLI Class VIII’s opinions and perceptions of the water issue in Florida.

General Water Findings

Within the water category, four sub-categories were consistently mentioned:

- Water Regulations/Restrictions
- Water Quality
- Water Supply
- Water Management

Water Regulations/Restrictions

Sources of Information and Issue Involvement

The following table explains sources of information, number of mentions and examples of answers from opinion leaders who identified water regulations/restrictions as being an issue. If no example answers are listed, then none were provided in the original survey.

Information Source	Number of Mentions
Agricultural Associations/Publications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fertilizer Institute • Florida Water Quality Coalition • FFBF • FFVA 	7
Other People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientists • Lobbyists • Personal Contacts 	5
Internet	4
Media	
Water Management Districts	3
EPA	2
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEP • Trade Seminars 	2

What Policy Makers Need to Know about Water Regulations/Restrictions

Class VIII felt that policy makers needed to know four major things about water regulations/restrictions.

1. **Difficulty of Compliance and Implications of Regulations**
7 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: Individuals in the ANR sectors must have the “ability to comply with the regulations that are being implemented and still engage in the production of agricultural products.

QUOTE: Policy makers need to know “the implications of restrictions and regulations on the ag industry and its surrounding communities.”

2. Cost of Implementation

5 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “EPA should conduct an independent economic analysis.”

QUOTE: “The cost of trying to obtain such will put not only farmers out of business but will cause economic hardships on our cities and counties and the citizens that pay for the services.”

3. More Science is Needed

4 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “Science is lacking to back up the criteria as established by the EPA.”

QUOTE: “They have not set the criteria based on good scientific data.”

4. Policy Makers need to be Educated

3 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: Policy makers need to know “facts about usage and contamination”

QUOTE: Policy makers need to know “alternatives to water treatment (ie BMPs); cause and effect relationship between mandated actions and subsequent (if any) water quality improvement.

Other responses that did not fit into a previously mentioned category included:

QUOTE: “Ag community cares and is willing to do their part to help.”

QUOTE: “Make clear the need for and specific criteria to meet the new water standards for Ag.”

With Whom do Opinion Leaders Share Information about this Issue?

The following table explains with whom Class VIII members are sharing information about Water Regulations/Restrictions.

Audience	Number of Mentions
Friends and Family	10

Co-workers	9
Business Associates	5
Association Memberships	4
Officials/Political Powers	4
Media	3
Other	3

What Outcomes to Opinion Leaders Predict from this Issue?

Three major outcomes were identified to result from the Water Regulation/Restriction Issue.

1. Increased Regulation

9 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “Unfortunately it is going to get much worse before it gets better.”

QUOTE: I predict “over penalization on ag as compared to community usage.”

QUOTE: I predict “less new quantities will be issued (water permits).”

2. Compliance Challenges

2 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “I think they are still reviewing this and we will see some revision, but it may still be very difficult to comply.”

3. Positive Revisions

2 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “With the amount of legal action taking place on the state level and help from our elected officials we will be able to change the current criteria to something that is doable.”

Other responses that did not fit within a previously mentioned category include:

QUOTE: “Cost of growing food, fiber, foliage in Florida will increase.”

QUOTE: “I hope as we move forward we will have a more important role in the decision process.”

Average Citizen Awareness

WLI Class VIII members were asked how likely it was that Florida Citizens were aware of water regulation/restriction issues. They were given a scale of 0-4 with zero being “Very Unlikely” and four being “Very Likely”. The mean for this scale was 1.12 making the collective response fall into the **UNLIKELY** category that consumers were aware of this issue.

Water Quality

Sources of Information and Issue Involvement

The following table explains sources of information, number of mentions and examples of answers from opinion leaders who identified water regulations/restrictions as being an issue. If no example answers are listed, then none were provided in original survey.

Information Source	Number of Mentions
Water Management Districts	4
Agricultural Associations/Publications	4
Government Entities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• DEP• FDACS	4
Media	1
Other People	1
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal Experience	1

What Policy Makers Need to Know about Water Quality

Class VIII felt that policy makers needed to know two major things about water quality.

1. Unrealistic/Unfair Burden on Agriculture

3 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: "The farmers in the Glades are put in the position to filter the water that comes off are property to a standard that is three times cleaner than rainwater....I think that is a pretty high burden to put on us."

QUOTE: "Water quality is the responsibility of all Floridians and not just those involved in ag. Cities and county municipalities must make the same sacrifices, rationing etc, regarding water that those of us in ag do."

2. Realistic Goals are Needed

3 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: "Make reachable goals, understand the processes."

QUOTE: "Cause and effect related to a water body's intended use -- how clean is clean?"

Other responses that did not fit into a previously mentioned category included:

QUOTE: “The state needs to make better use of the land purchased for water filtration and storage for agricultural use. There are thousands of acres in St. Lucie county purchased about 12 years ago specifically for that use yet with fewer agricultural users we are still competing for water.”

QUOTE: “Scientific.”

With Whom do Opinion Leaders Share Information about this Issue?

The following table explains with whom Class VIII members are sharing information about Water Regulations/Restrictions.

Audience	Number of Mentions
Co-workers	6
Business Associates	3
Friends/Family	3
Association Memberships	1
Officials/Political Powers	1
Media	1
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Committees	1

What Outcomes do Opinion Leaders Predict from this Issue?

Two major outcomes were identified to result from the Water Regulation/Restriction Issue.

1. Improved Standards

3 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “Florida's water quality will improve.”

QUOTE: “Better water quality will be realized throughout the state. More people on all levels are becoming educated and aware of the importance of this topic..”

2. More Regulation/Impossible Expectations

2 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “impossible expectations”

QUOTE: “more regulation”

Other responses that did not fit within a previously mentioned category include:

QUOTE: “The state will continue to drag their heels and the land purchased for water storage will languish for several more years to come. Private investors sure can't afford to behave this way.”

QUOTE: “Not good.”

Average Citizen Awareness

WLI Class VIII members were asked how likely it was that Florida Citizens were aware of water quality issues. They were given a scale of 0-4 with zero being “Very Unlikely” and four being “Very Likely”. The mean for this scale was 2.12 making the collective response fall into the **UNDECIDED** category. This category indicates the WLI Class VIII members were undecided about consumer awareness of the water quality issue.

Water Supply

Sources of Information and Issue Involvement

The following table explains sources of information, number of mentions and examples of answers from opinion leaders who identified water regulations/restrictions as being an issue. If no example answers are listed, then none were provided in original survey.

Information Source	Number of Mentions
Water Management Districts	2
Agricultural Associations/Publications	2
Internet	2
Other People	2
Media	1
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Army Corp	1

What Policy Makers Need to Know about Water Supply

Class VIII felt that policy makers needed to know one major thing about water supply.

1. Agriculture must have access to water
3 responses fell into this category

QUOTE: “Actions needed now to insure adequate supplies 5, 10, 20, 50 years later for agriculture, environment and people.”

QUOTE: “Agriculture needs a cheap source of water to grow the safe, affordable and abundant food supply.”

Other responses that did not fit into a previously mentioned category included:

QUOTE: “Water supply issues are becoming more critical in many parts of the state. Water quality issues are being pushed by EPA, DEP, and environmental groups using unsound science.”

QUOTE: "I think they know exactly what they're doing. Under the auspices of "environment" or "public safety" they are containing the fresh water sources so they can be regulated and sold."

With Whom do Opinion Leaders Share Information about this Issue?

The following table explains with whom Class VIII members are sharing information about Water Regulations/Restrictions.

Audience	Number of Mentions
Friends/Family	4
Co-workers	2
Other Farmers	2
Business Associates	1
Association Memberships	1
Officials/Political Powers	1
Media	1
Other	1
• Tour groups	

What Outcomes to Opinion Leaders Predict from this Issue?

WLI Class VIII members were not able to come to any consensus about the outcome of this issue. The individual responses are reported below.

QUOTE: "expensive alternative water supply"

QUOTE: "We will be in the situation CA is in, just a matter of time."

QUOTE: "Potentially could reduce Ag growth, will cause additional stress between Ag industry and urban areas"

QUOTE: "Rationing/metering/reductions in permitted use amounts."

QUOTE: "Without some change in thinking and being able to work with the environmental community. I do not see a big change coming soon."

Average Citizen Awareness

WLI Class VIII members were asked how likely it was that Florida Citizens were aware of water supply issues. They were given a scale of 0-4 with zero being "Very Unlikely" and four being "Very Likely". The mean for this scale was 1 making the collective response fall into the **UNLIKELY** category. This category indicates the WLI Class VIII members felt it was unlikely that there was consumer awareness about the water supply issue.

Water Management

Sources of Information and Issue Involvement

The following table explains sources of information, number of mentions and examples of answers from opinion leaders who identified water regulations/restrictions as being an issue. If no example answers are listed, then none were provided in original survey.

Information Source	Number of Mentions
Water Management Districts	3
Agricultural Associations/Publications	2
Other People	2
Media	1
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Groups 	1

What Policy Makers Need to Know about Water Management

WLI Class VIII members were not able to come to any consensus about the outcome of this issue. The individual responses are reported below.

QUOTE: “Consider natural nutrient level of water body, and if runoff is cause, then identify where nutrients are coming from. May not be farm, could be homeowners.”

QUOTE: “We have to have water to have high production levels. Ag has come a long way on this issue and we are working to do our part.”

QUOTE: “Farmers only use what they need to produce. They continually try to reduce their water use through new concepts. Try to work with them not dictate to them.”

QUOTE: “Water mgmt districts are becoming a bottle neck and to powerful when it comes to permitting.”

With Whom do Opinion Leaders Share Information about this Issue?

The following table explains with whom Class VIII members are sharing information about Water Regulations/Restrictions.

Audience	Number of Mentions
Co-workers	2
Everyone	2
Business Associates	1
Family	1
Political Powers	1
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students 	1

What Outcomes to Opinion Leaders Predict from this Issue?

WLI Class VIII members were not able to come to any consensus about the outcome of this issue. The individual responses are reported below.

QUOTE: “Constant battle with more gov't restrictions.”

QUOTE: “Better conservation practices and better knowledge about the needs of the farm to match its usage.”

QUOTE: “Potentially could reduce Ag growth, will cause additional stress between Ag industry and urban areas”

QUOTE: “There will continue to be a struggle till we develop better methods of managing our water resources.”

QUOTE: “no change.”

Average Citizen Awareness

WLI Class VIII members were asked how likely it was that Florida Citizens were aware of water management issues. They were given a scale of 0-4 with zero being “Very Unlikely” and four being “Very Likely”. The mean for this scale was 2.12 making the collective response fall into the **UNLIKELY** category. This category indicates the WLI Class VIII members felt it was unlikely that there was consumer awareness about the water management issue.

Findings

- Opinion leaders were able to identify “water” as an important issue facing Florida ANR sectors but beyond this general finding, opinion leaders were unable to come to clear consensus about a specific water issue.
- According to this study, opinion leaders are sending mixed messages to policy makers about the issues involving water in the state of Florida. There are very few consistencies in the messages being shared to policy makers.
- This study reveals that agricultural opinion leaders are sharing the majority of their information with family/friends and co-workers. Typically these people tend to think similarly to the opinion leader, confirming a Ruth (2003) finding that the agricultural community tends to talk to itself.
- Additionally, opinion leaders are sharing multiple different messages with family/friends and co-workers about water as an issue, thus allowing for potential confusion about this issue within the agricultural industry.
- When discussing sources of information about water issues, none of the WLI Class VIII members specifically mentioned UF/IFAS as a source of information. In discussion during the Tallahassee seminar, Class VIII members mentioned the wording of the question may have caused them to omit IFAS as an information source.

- This study found that the messages WLI Class VIII members wanted to share with policy makers were typically framed in an “individual freedom” manner instead of a “public good” manner.

Recommendations

Based on the results from this study, the PIE Center recommends the following:

- Agricultural opinion leaders should work to frame their messages consistently and in a way that appeals to policy makers. Policy makers look for items to be framed in a way that highlights the public good. However, currently opinion leaders appear to frame messages to policy makers in a manner that reflects individual freedom. For example, opinion leaders are discussing how this issue will affect only the agriculture industry. Consideration should be given to crafting a message that conveys the effect of this issue on agriculture while at the same time highlighting the effect this issue could have on the general public.
- Once a consistent message is developed, agricultural opinion leaders should begin engaging in agenda building techniques surrounding this issue. Agenda building is the process by which news organizations feature or select certain issues to cover over others. Agenda building is used to get an issue on the radar screen of the legislative body that deals with it. In order to effectively engage in agenda building, opinion leaders should work to influence the public agenda, the media agenda and the policy agenda.

Next Steps

A follow-up survey will be sent to Class VIII members in July in an effort to understand more about members’ tendencies as opinion leaders and their propensity to be an “issues-seller.” Additionally, a session will be held at the July seminar in Gainesville to reveal the results and actions steps from the upcoming June survey.