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Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32307-3100

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCES
OFFICE OF THE DEAN
217 PERRY-PAIGE BUILDING, SOUTH

TELEPHONE: (850) 561-2644

December 8, 2025

Hernando County Board of County Commissioners
15470 Flight Path Dr.
Brooksville, FL 34604

Dear Chair Campbell and Honorable Commissioners:

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), through its College of Agriculture and Food Sciences (CAFS) and the Brooksville Agricultural and Environmental Research Station (BAERS), is pleased to submit the attached **unsolicited, no-cost lease proposal** for the subleased, State of Florida-owned property immediately adjacent to the BAERS site.

We understand that the formal Request for Proposals (RFP) submission period for this property has concluded. However, Hernando County staff have indicated an interest in receiving and reviewing an unsolicited proposal from FAMU, given the clear alignment between the County's goals and FAMU's land-grant mission of research, teaching, and extension in service to the citizens of Florida.

The subject property includes:

- Seven (7) cabins, each with four bedrooms and four baths;
- Two primary common-use buildings—one with a large kitchen and dining area, and another with a large meeting/conference room; and
- Additional facilities, including the historic Manor and several auxiliary structures.

FAMU proposes to assume full operational responsibility for these facilities under a **no-cost lease for an initial term of five (5) years**, with the specific intent of:

- Providing short-term housing and workspace for researchers, graduate students, and extension personnel working at BAERS;
- Hosting workshops, training sessions, and community outreach activities that support agricultural innovation, natural resource stewardship, and workforce development in Hernando County; and
- Maintaining and enhancing the property in a manner that preserves its historic and environmental value while increasing its utilization for public benefit.

This proposal has been **reviewed by FAMU's legal counsel, Attorney Self, for legal consistency** with FAMU's authorities and obligations as a public university and 1890 land-grant institution.

We believe this partnership represents a unique opportunity for Hernando County and FAMU to work together to advance regional innovation, economic development, and educational access—at no direct lease cost to the County.

Thank you for your consideration of this unsolicited proposal. We would welcome the opportunity to present this concept in person and respond to any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Dale Wesson".

G. Dale Wesson, Ph.D., P.E.

Dean and Director of Land-Grant Programs
College of Agriculture and Food Sciences
Florida A&M University
850.561.2644
garlen.wesson@famu.edu

UNSOLICITED NO-COST LEASE PROPOSAL
FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL UNIVERSITY (FAMU)
BROOKSVILLE AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH STATION
(BAERS)
LEASE AND OPERATION OF ADJACENT COUNTY-OWNED PROPERTY

Date: December 8, 2025

Submitted To:

Hernando County Board of County Commissioners
15470 Flight Path Dr.
Brooksville, FL 34604

Submitted By:

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU)
College of Agriculture and Food Sciences (CAFS)
c/o Brooksville Agricultural and Environmental Research Station (BAERS)
1740 S. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd
217 S. Perry-Paige Building
Tallahassee, FL 32307

Primary Contact:

Dr. G. Dale Wesson, Ph.D., P.E.
Dean and Director of Land-Grant Programs
College of Agriculture and Food Sciences
Florida A&M University
850.561.2644 | garlen.wesson@famu.edu

Technical/Operations Contact:

Dr. Ramdeo Seepaul
Executive Director, Brooksville Agricultural and Environmental Research Station
Florida A&M University
850.412.7821 | ramdeo.seepaul@famu.edu

1. Executive Summary

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) proposes to enter into a **no-cost lease agreement** with Hernando County for the subleased, State of Florida-owned property immediately adjacent to the BAERS site.

Property Overview

The subject property consists of:

- Seven (7) fully equipped cabins (4 bedrooms / 4 baths each);
- A large kitchen and dining facility suitable for group meals and training events;
- A conference/meeting building capable of hosting workshops, seminars, and community meetings;
- The historic Manor; and
- Supporting structures and grounds.

Purpose of the Lease

FAMU's primary objectives are to:

- Support **research, teaching, and extension activities** at BAERS by providing on-site lodging and facilities;
- Expand **community and stakeholder engagement** through workshops and training for farmers, youth, and local organizations;
- Preserve and maintain the property's **historic and environmental character** while increasing its utilization; and
- Promote **regional economic development** through agricultural innovation, workforce training, and tourism-related educational programming.

Key Terms (High Level)

- **Lease Type:** No-cost lease
- **Initial Term:** Five (5) years, with potential renewal upon mutual agreement
- **Lessee Responsibilities:** Day-to-day operations, routine maintenance, utilities, insurance coverage as required by the County, and programmatic activities aligned with public benefit
- **Lessor (County) Role:** Property ownership, structural oversight as mutually agreed, and collaboration on major capital improvements and long-term planning

This proposal has been **reviewed by FAMU's legal counsel, Attorney Self, for legal consistency** with FAMU's authorities and obligations as a public university and 1890 land-grant institution.

2. Background and Rationale

2.1 FAMU and BAERS

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) is Florida's only public Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and is designated as an **1890 land-grant institution**.

Through its land-grant mission, FAMU delivers research, education, and extension programs that promote sustainable agriculture, environmental stewardship, and economic resilience across the state.

The **Brooksville Agricultural and Environmental Research Station (BAERS)** encompasses more than 3,800 acres and serves as a critical hub for:

- Agronomic and livestock research;
- Conservation and natural resource management;
- Student training and workforce preparation; and
- Extension programming for farmers, communities, and youth.

2.2 County-Owned Adjacent Property

The County-owned parcel adjacent to BAERS is uniquely positioned to enhance these activities by providing **on-site lodging, meeting space, and support facilities**. Currently, underutilization of the cabins and associated facilities limits their potential public benefit.

By combining BAERS' extensive land and research infrastructure with the lodging and meeting assets on the adjacent property, FAMU and Hernando County can jointly create a **regional center of excellence for agricultural and environmental innovation**.

3. Property Description

The proposed lease covers the following primary components (collectively, the "Property"):

1. **Cabins (7 units)**
 - Each cabin includes 4 bedrooms and 4 baths.
 - Suitable for housing faculty, researchers, graduate students, visiting scholars, and extension personnel.
2. **Dining/Kitchen Facility**
 - Large commercial-style kitchen and dining area.
 - Used for group meals during workshops, training events, retreats, and conferences.
3. **Conference/Meeting Building**
 - Open floor plan with capacity for seminars, training sessions, and community meetings.
 - Equipped (or to be equipped) with audio-visual capabilities, internet connectivity, and flexible seating.
4. **Historic Manor**
 - Architecturally and historically significant structure.
 - Intended for a combination of administrative use, small meetings, and interpretive/heritage programming, subject to County conditions and historic preservation guidelines.

5. Grounds and Auxiliary Structures

- Parking areas, walkways, storage facilities, and outdoor spaces that support educational and outreach activities.

4. Proposed Use and Operations Plan

4.1 Primary Uses

FAMU proposes to use the Property for the following purposes:

- **Research Support:**
 - Short-term lodging for faculty, graduate students, technicians, and collaborators conducting research at BAERS.
 - Workspace for data analysis, project meetings, and planning sessions.
- **Extension and Outreach:**
 - Workshops and field days for local and regional farmers, producers, and landowners.
 - Youth programs (e.g., 4-H-type activities, STEM camps, and agricultural literacy programs).
 - Community meetings on topics such as water conservation, soil health, climate resilience, and emerging crops.
- **Training and Workforce Development:**
 - Capacity-building programs for agricultural professionals, technicians, and students.
 - Certification or continuing education sessions related to agriculture, natural resources, and environmental management.
- **Limited Revenue-Generating Activities (If Approved by County):**
 - Modest cost-recovery fees for lodging or event use associated with FAMU programs, with revenues dedicated to maintenance and program support.
 - Any such arrangements would be structured to ensure compliance with County policies and the public-purpose requirements.

4.2 Operations and Management

FAMU will:

- Designate **BAERS leadership (Executive Director and staff)** as the day-to-day managers of the Property;
- Establish **standard operating procedures (SOPs)** for reservations, use of facilities, safety, and security;
- Coordinate scheduling to avoid conflicts and ensure priority use for research and extension activities; and
- Implement **check-in/check-out, facility inspection, and incident reporting protocols**.

5. Term, Financial Structure, and In-Kind Contributions

5.1 Lease Term

- **Initial Term:** Five (5) years from the effective date of the lease agreement.
- **Renewal:** One or more renewal terms (e.g., 5 years) may be negotiated and agreed upon in writing by both parties, subject to performance and County approval.

5.2 Financial Arrangement

- **Lease Rate:** FAMU proposes a **no-cost lease** (no base rent) in recognition of the substantial **in-kind value** of FAMU's educational and economic contributions to Hernando County and the State of Florida.
- **Operating Costs:** FAMU will be responsible for day-to-day operating costs, including utilities and routine maintenance, as negotiated and specified in the lease.

5.3 In-Kind and Public Benefit Contributions

In lieu of lease payments, FAMU's use of the Property will generate public value through:

- Expanded **research and innovation** in agriculture and environmental sciences;
- Increased **extension and community programming** for Hernando County residents;
- **Student training and workforce development** that contributes to local and regional employment pipelines;
- Potential draw for **educational tourism and visiting scholars**, which may positively impact local businesses; and
- **Preservation and enhancement** of County assets, including the historic Manor and associated facilities.

6. Maintenance, Improvements, and Capital Projects

6.1 Routine Maintenance

Subject to the final lease agreement, FAMU proposes to:

- Assume responsibility for **routine custodial care, minor repairs, grounds-keeping, and basic facility upkeep**;
- Maintain cabins, meeting spaces, and common areas in a **safe, clean, and functional condition**; and
- Report any structural or major systems concerns to the County promptly.

6.2 Capital Improvements

- Any substantial capital improvements (e.g., major HVAC replacement, roofing, structural repair, or significant renovations) will be undertaken **only with County approval** and subject to mutually agreed terms.
- Where appropriate and feasible, FAMU may seek **state, federal, or private grant funding** to support property improvements that enhance public value.

6.3 Historic Preservation

- For the **historic Manor**, all modifications and uses will comply with applicable historic preservation requirements, and FAMU will work with the County to ensure any work respects the building's character and regulatory requirements.

7. Insurance, Risk Management, and Compliance

7.1 Insurance

FAMU will maintain, at its expense, insurance coverage consistent with:

- **General liability** coverage in amounts acceptable to the County;
- Property and casualty coverage as appropriate for FAMU-owned equipment; and
- Any other coverage required by the lease and consistent with FAMU's status as a public institution.

Proof of insurance and any required endorsements naming Hernando County as an additional insured will be provided upon execution of the lease and updated as required.

7.2 Risk Management and Safety

- FAMU will implement **safety and emergency procedures** for all activities conducted on the Property.
- All activities will adhere to FAMU policies, County ordinances, and applicable state and federal regulations.
- FAMU will promptly notify the County of any incidents that may affect property condition, safety, or liability.

7.3 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

FAMU will:

- Comply with all applicable **local, state, and federal laws and regulations**;
- Ensure activities are consistent with FAMU's public mission and the County's public-purpose requirements; and

- Adhere to any **zoning, environmental, and permitting** requirements associated with the Property.

8. Community and Economic Impact

Through this proposed partnership, Hernando County can expect:

- **Expanded educational opportunities** for local youth, producers, and residents;
- **Enhanced visibility** as a hub for agricultural and environmental innovation;
- Potential **economic benefits** from visiting researchers, students, and participants at workshops and conferences;
- Strengthened **university–county collaboration** that can support future joint projects (e.g., watershed planning, conservation initiatives, and agritourism).

9. Requested Action and Next Steps

FAMU respectfully requests that the Hernando County Board of County Commissioners:

1. **Formally accept and consider** this unsolicited, no-cost lease proposal;
2. Authorize **County staff to negotiate a lease agreement** with FAMU consistent with the terms outlined herein; and
3. Provide direction regarding any additional information, due diligence, or public hearing processes required to advance this partnership.

Upon indication of the Board's interest, FAMU is prepared to:

- Participate in a **work session or formal presentation** to the Board;
- Collaborate with County legal and administrative staff to draft specific lease language; and
- Develop a **joint implementation timeline** for transitioning operations to FAMU upon execution of the lease.

Attachment A – Current and Proposed Matrix of Responsibility

Chinsegut Hill Retreat and Conference Center

<u>Facility / Area</u>	<u>Current Responsibility</u>	<u>Proposed Under FAMU</u>
Manor House	Tampa Bay History Center (TBHC)	TBHC continues heritage role; integrated under FAMU oversight
Cabins / Cottages	Hernando County Facilities	FAMU assumes full operations and maintenance
Dining Hall & Conference	Hernando County Facilities	FAMU manages events, maintenance, retains revenue
Caretaker's House	Hernando County	FAMU assigns on-site facility manager
Trails & Grounds	County Parks & FDEP	FAMU implements stewardship and coordinates with County
Artifacts / Archives	TBHC & USF Archaeology	FAMU coordinates research access and ensures compliance
Education Programs	TBHC & County Extension	FAMU expands STEM, agritourism, workforce development
Utilities & Insurance	County Facilities	FAMU assumes utilities and insurance obligations
Capital Repairs	County	FAMU handles routine; County approves major projects
Public Access	County / TBHC	FAMU maintains access and provides quarterly reports