

Subject: Today's U.S. Sugar News for September 27 to 29, 2008

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County's Coastal Elite Again Shoots Down Needs Of The West

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Countys Coastal Elite Again Shoots Down Needs Of The West

Don Brown 19.SEP.08

The coastal elite of Palm Beach County apparently figuring that the best time to kick a dog is when its down delivered two back-to-back body blows to the western communities just in the past week. And they delivered them with an arrogance comparable to the recent Russian invasion of the tiny nation of Georgia.

In the space of a week, the Palm Beach County Commission voted to effectively steal some \$20 million from residents of The Acreage, while the coastal establishment, led by the island enclave of Palm Beach and the Palm Beach Post, lined up against the proposed inland port that could create the largest industry in the Glades in 100 years or more just as a large sugar firm agreed to bite the dust in favor of Everglades restoration.

The grand theft involves the county commissions vote to deflect \$10 million out of next years earmarked money to pay for improvements on Seminole Pratt Whitney Road to the Beeline Highway and turn it over to Palm Tran and Tri Rail in favor of the coastal population. I dont think a Palm Tran bus or a Tri Rail train has ever been to The Acreage.

To pay for other coastal amenities, the county also plans to eliminate an additional \$10 million in other road improvements from its five-year road plan, including the widening of Seminole Pratt Whitney from Orange Blvd. to Seminole Ridge High School and the widening of Northlake Blvd. from Seminole Pratt to the Ibis neighborhood.

Indian Trail Improvement District Administrator Chris King noted that nearly 60 percent of all county roads being removed from the five-year plan are in the County Commissions District 6 in the western communities. County promises made, county promises broken.

The Acreage is an easy target for the county commission, which generally represents (6 to 1) the eastern corridor from Boca Raton to Jupiter, because the area is unincorporated and has little clout to stop the pillage and plunder. Acreage residents generally pay the same taxes as other county residents, but get far less of that money back in services. Thats a fact not lost on ITID board supervisors, led by President Mike Erickson, who delivered a passionate plea for the money at last weeks county commission meeting.

For his part, District 6 County Commissioner Jess Santamaria asked some tough questions about how that money is spent and vowed that if the Acreage roads arent restored when another vote comes up in November, he might be up for a fight. That might be a good time for ITID to rent a bunch of those Palm Tran buses for residents to join Mr. Santamaria in a showdown at the OK Corral.

Meanwhile, our cousins to the west in South Bay, Belle Glade and Pahokee are getting little more than a cool response to a Port of Palm Beach proposal to build an inland port in the Glades to serve as a receiving and distribution center for cargo. The site near Lake Okeechobee and rail lines would enhance the Port of Palm Beach and provide perhaps even more jobs than the 2,000 estimated to

be lost when U.S. Sugar property is purchased by the South Florida Water Management District to help in the massive effort to restore the Everglades.

Florida Crystals, the other Big Sugar company, has already offered to sell some of its property for the inland port. That was good news for the long-ignored Glades residents, who have been economically depressed since most current residents moved into Palm Beach County. However, their plea for support has met a cool reception from the east. The Town of Palm Beach has hired an expensive lobbying firm to fight the project in Washington, D. C. and the Palm Beach Post also seems to be throwing cold water on the proposal.

Editorial Page Editor Randy Schultz almost flippantly wrote last Sunday that busloads of people from the farm towns around Lake Okeechobee showed up at the Palm Beach County Commission chambers. He opined that inland port sounds like jumbo shrimp and I, a former resident of the shrimp capital of New Orleans and a connoisseur of jumbo shrimp, didnt get the metaphor. He said, seemingly sarcastically, that the people from the buses, many of them African-American, talked about how their towns had been neglected for decades. They are right, but the coastal establishment doesnt want to be bothered by that fact.

They talked about how the wealthy coast hasnt done enough for the poor inland towns, Mr. Schultz wrote. They were right about that, too, largely due to the lack of interest from Mr. Schultz and the Palm Beach Post and the rest of the coast. They talked about children who couldnt come back to the Glades from college because there are no jobs, he said. Does anyone dispute that?

He added insult to injury by saying that a few representatives from environmental groups warned that rushing on an inland port could upset Everglades restoration, which the \$1.75 billion buyout of U.S. Sugar is supposed to help. They might as well have been atheists at a revival. A revival? A racist metaphor if I ever heard one. How about pleading with the county commission for the same type of fast-track help they gave Scripps?

Sometimes African-Americans show up at the county commission for long-denied help, just like folks from The Acreage, not for a revival. Sometimes they show up to get the same respect the coast has always had. How many peoples economic survival must be sacrificed for a microscopic fish or a fern? How much social and economic health should we give up to the wealthy lawyers who control the environmental kooks who lack the common sense to put humans into their goofy equations?

Oh, and did we mention who paid for all those buses? Mr. Schultz added at the end of his editorial. No, he didnt, and I didnt get the question. Did he mean Florida Crystals? Mr. Santamaria perhaps? Both are in full support of the inland port proposal, and I would hope that the next time they want to send folks to a county commission meeting to support the inland port, that they add a lot more (Palm Tran buses would make a good statement) and stop off for more passengers from The Acreage, Royal Palm Beach and Wellington.

Mr. Santamaria did his constituents a great service twice in one week. He stood up for the western communities against the coastal elite.

19.SEP.08 Countys Coastal Elite Again Shoots Down Needs Of The West

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Sep 26, 2008 (Dow Jones Commodities News via Comtex) --
By Susan Buchanan

Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

NEW ORLEANS (Dow Jones)--Cargill Inc. plans to start building the nation's biggest sugar refinery in Louisiana soon, raising concerns that the U.S. industry - which has 10 plants already - will be saddled with too much capacity.

Cargill and its partner, Sugar Growers and Refiners Inc. - a 700-member Louisiana cooperative with seven cane mills -intended to open the plant in 2008. But after a series of delays, some observers have begun to wonder if construction will ever start. Work has yet to begin on the Mississippi River site at Reserve, La., nearly six months after an April ground-breaking ceremony.

Bill Brady, Cargill spokesman, this week said his company and Sugar Growers and Refiners remain committed to the project.

"We're still crossing t's and dotting i's on finances in the current environment" of tight lending. "But as soon as that's finished, we'll proceed with construction, which should take 18 to 24 months."

The plant is now expected to open in late 2010.

Located at Cargill's grain-export operation in Reserve, the facility should refine one million tons of raw sugar yearly - nearly 70% of Louisiana's output. Growers and mills will have to invest in building the plant and its operational expenses, but will also share in any profits.

Cargill's plans to build the Reserve refinery evolved earlier this decade after the company was approached by Louisiana producers about pursuing a joint venture. Growers' attempts to discuss a venture with other refiners fizzled but Cargill was receptive. Cargill said in November 2005 that the Reserve plant would add to its marketing alliances with other U.S. sugar groups - Southern

Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative and Wyoming Sugar Co.

Cargill also said in late 2005 that the Louisiana joint venture would allow the company to extend its full-service, sweetener presence to a new region, while contributing to the state's recovery after Hurricane Katrina.

Estimated annual U.S. sugar refining capacity is 6.6 million short tons, raw value, with capacity demand at 5.38 million short tons, according to industry estimates. About 900,000 tons of capacity at Imperial Sugar Co.'s (IPSU) Savannah, Ga., plant is unusable, however, because of repair work after an explosion destroyed part of that facility in February.

Domino, Others Question Need For New Plant

Most Louisiana cane is committed to mills and two big refineries run by Domino Foods in Chalmette and Imperial Sugar in Gramercy.

"The U.S. has sufficient refining capacity now, but if Cargill goes ahead and builds its Reserve plant by 2010, we'll have surplus capacity then," said Brian O'Malley, president of Domino Foods.

His company and other refiners already are concerned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's decision in August to allow more refined sugar into the nation under a government program. Unsold, unprocessed sugar has been sitting in U.S. warehouses.

Domino's sugar is produced domestically at five refineries, with the company using imported raws, along with sugar grown in Florida, Louisiana, Texas and Hawaii. Domino Foods is the entity marketing refined sugar produced by American Sugar Refining Inc. in Yonkers, N.Y. Both units are owned by American Sugar Holdings Inc.

"U.S. cane sugar refineries have been running at far less than full capacity in most years," said Jack Roney, an economist with the Virginia-based American Sugar Alliance, representing growers and refiners. "A notable exception would be the few months immediately after the hurricanes of 2005. Even with Imperial's Savannah refinery down since last February, most refineries have not needed to run at full capacity."

When the explosion occurred at Imperial's Savannah plant, U.S. refineries had been operating at 80% of capacity or less, and were able to ramp up production. The Georgia plant accounts for 58% of Imperial's annual output, with the company's Louisiana operation providing the rest. Before the explosion, Imperial's U.S. production was nearly 1.5 million tons of refined sugar annually.

John Sheptor, Imperial Sugar's president and CEO, said this week that Savannah's industrial sugar operations will restart in November and that the plant's packaging facilities will reopen next summer.

Domino picked up its refining pace for months after the explosion in Savannah. But U.S. refined sugar prices nonetheless rose this spring and summer, and sugar users complained to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

O'Malley questioned the USDA's decision to let in more refined sugar, saying "we don't know of any customers in the U.S. that

haven't been able to procure what they need."

Roney at the American Sugar Alliance said the USDA's recent increase in the refined import-quota has contributed to a "serious idling of refinery capacity." He also said that U.S. capacity would remain more than adequate for many years.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sugar Corp. is uncertain about the disposition of its Clewiston, Fla., refinery when the company's land is transferred to the state of Florida in the next decade. That plant was built 10 years ago and is among the five biggest in the nation. In a deal closing this fall, the company's cane acres will be returned to wetlands.

-By Susan Buchanan, Dow Jones Newswires; 504-371-5461 susan.buchanan@dowjones.com

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Everglades restoration buyout deal may not close door on U.S. Sugar But can a pact accommodating bus

09/28/2008

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Sep. 28--A 'Going Out of Business' sign could be premature for U. S. Sugar Corp.

Even as the state negotiates a buyout of the sugar giant in the name of Everglades restoration, new U.S. Sugar ventures are being considered and vestiges of the company could remain long after the deal gets done.

Although that could protect jobs that Glades communities are worried about losing, it also raises questions about whether a deal that accommodates business plans also can benefit the Everglades.

The buyout deal calls for the South Florida Water Management District to pay \$1.75 billion for U.S. Sugar's 187,000 acres and all of the company's assets, making way to restore flows of water from Lake Okeechobee to the Everglades.

The deal initially envisioned U.S. Sugar ending its operations within six years, but now opportunities for the company to stay in business include:

-- The state leasing land back to U.S. Sugar to generate revenue and keep property in agricultural production until Everglades restoration work begins. Construction of reservoirs and treatment areas could take 20 years to complete.

-- Carving about 11,000 acres out of the deal to allow rock mines previously planned on U.S. Sugar land.

-- U.S. Sugar's Clewiston mill teaming with an Illinois ethanol production company to produce biofuel.

Representatives for the Coskata ethanol company were in Tallahassee, Clewiston and West Palm Beach on Wednesday and Thursday to continue talks with the state, U.S. Sugar and other companies about building one or more plants in South Florida, said Wes Bolsen, Coskata's chief marketing officer.

Ethanol production could provide a new direction for U.S. Sugar and help replace sugar-related jobs that Glades communities worry about losing in the state buyout. 'This is about local farmers growing the crop that we are going to turn into fuels,' Bolsen said of the potential for a \$400 million plant that could produce 100 million gallons of ethanol a year.

After the proposed buyout was announced June 24, U.S. Sugar officials said they planned to sell all the land and everything from the multimillion-dollar sugar mill down to the company's last wrench.

Since then, the water management district has suggested changing the boundaries of the area targeted for restoration -- creating flexibility to possibly dodge land planned for rock mining, leave room for ethanol production and avoid land deals with the other sugar giant, Florida Crystals.

U.S. Sugar Senior Vice President Robert Coker would not comment on the specifics of the buyout negotiations, but said a key objective is to keep the company's assets operating to protect jobs in Glades communities.

Coker wouldn't say whether that means U.S. Sugar or another buyer would keep them running. He has said the ethanol proposal could turn into a new venture for the company, compatible with ongoing Everglades restoration.

Negotiating guidelines agreed to in June between the state and U.S. Sugar called for the company to keep operating for up to six years after approval of the buyout. Those nonbinding guidelines, however, allowed for extending the six-year period.

The water management district would not comment on the negotiations, said agency spokesman Gabe Margasak.

Florida Crystals expressed interest in acquiring the Clewiston mill from the state, but talks remain stalled while U.S. Sugar buyout negotiations continue, said Gaston Cantens, Florida Crystals' vice president for corporate relations.

One of the determining factors in a deal for the U.S. Sugar mill and an ethanol facility will be how much cane production continues on U.S. Sugar land to supply the mill and provide leafy leftovers to convert to fuel, Cantens said. 'You still need sugar cane. You don't just pull ethanol out of thin air,' Cantens said. Florida Crystals has talked with Coskata and other ethanol companies, he said.

The emerging buyout proposal doesn't match the much-lauded vision announced by Gov. Charlie Crist in June to restore the

missing link between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, said Miccosukee Tribe attorney Dexter Lehtinen. Instead of removing U.S. Sugar as a barrier to restoration, Lehtinen said the 'politically motivated' land deal threatens to prove too costly and end up stalling previously planned Everglades restoration projects. 'The 187,000 acres is going to get cut down substantially,' said Lehtinen, who filed suit challenging the U.S. Sugar deal. 'This is guaranteeing that sugar cane stays in the Everglades.' The water district says leasing land back to U.S. Sugar or other users allows property to generate revenue and taxes while waiting for construction to begin.

The district and U.S. Sugar missed a deadline to produce a sales contract in September. Instead of closing by Nov. 30, closing the deal is now expected to be in 2009.

Andy Reid can be reached at abreid@SunSentinel.com or 561-228-5504.

An opponent

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Staying alive

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What does Charlie Crist have against Central Florida?

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It was all well and good a few months ago when Florida announced his grand plan to save the Everglades. The state would buy 187,000 acres from U.S. Sugar Corp. for \$1.7 billion so that fresh water could once again stream into the vast expanse of needy marshlands. The idea seemed to make sense and was seen as strong leadership by the governor.

But while he's so worried about South Florida and its environmental problems, what's the governor got against Central Florida?

Twice in the past six months, Crist has shown an appalling lack of leadership when it comes to environmental and transportation issues here.

Letdown No. 1: When commuter rail was fighting for its life in the Legislature last spring, there was one person who could have pulled together all the disparate parts -- trial attorneys, labor unions and a rebellious Republican state senator. That would be Republican Charlie Crist.

U.S. SUGAR MIGHT SURVIVE DESPITE EVERGLADES DEAL

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