

# PalmBeachPost

## **Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative joins industry group as Farm Bill looms**

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The Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida, based in Belle Glade, is once again represented by The Florida Sugar Cane League, the industry trade association.

This move ensures that the three major sugarcane companies in Florida – along with their independent growers – are fully united under the banner of the Florida Sugar Cane League as debate over no-cost American sugar policy takes place in Congress, league officials said.

Sugar cane is planted on approximately 440,000 acres in the Everglades Agricultural Area. Most of the production is in Palm Beach County, but sugarcane is also grown in Hendry, Glades and Martin counties.

“With the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative, we are united under the Florida Sugar Cane League as Congress considers the future of farm policy and food security in America,” Ryan Weston, CEO of the Florida Sugar Cane League, said Monday. “Florida’s sugarcane farmers play such an important role in helping to secure America’s domestic food supply in one of the most important food producing regions of the entire country.”

Carolyn Cheney, who died in February at the age of 77, had represented the Cooperative in government affairs in Washington for 27 years.

This year is a crucial year for farmers as the 2018 Farm Bill goes through the political process. The farm bill is a comprehensive food and agriculture bill that Congress typically enacts every four of five years.

It covers more than farms and farmers and also affects conservation, trade, nutrition, jobs and infrastructure, agricultural research, forestry and energy.

While the sugar industry lobbies to keep the federal sugar program, large sugar users such as candy companies, have lobbied for years to end the program.

A Cato Institute study released Tuesday found that government market manipulation results in domestic sugar prices twice those of the world sugar market.

Tony Contreras, President and CEO of the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative, said, “On behalf of our 44 member growers, their families and our employees, we are thrilled to once again be joined

in a united front through the Florida Sugar Cane League with U.S. Sugar and Florida Crystals in Washington, D.C. efforts. Even when the Cooperative was not formally part of the League, we still worked together on common issues, particularly important legislative policies. We're happy to provide a united voice on behalf of the more than 12,500 people in Florida employed by sugarcane farming and processing."

Robert Buker, President and CEO of Clewiston-based U.S. Sugar Corp. said, "With the Cooperative and its growers back on board, Florida's representation in Washington is unified in its efforts to retain commonsense, zero-cost sugar policy in our nation's capital. Both sugar as a matter of national farm policy and as a food product remain a bargain, and we intend to keep it that way. The last thing we need is for predatory foreign governments who heavily subsidize their own sugar farmers to be putting American farmers out of business."

Pepe Fanjul, Jr., Executive Vice President of Florida Crystals Corp., headquartered in West Palm Beach, said, "Florida Crystals partners with Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative on many business fronts and we're delighted to work with them through the Florida Sugar Cane League. This announcement sends a message that our industry is more united than ever. We look forward to working with our friends at the Cooperative throughout the Farm Bill debate to ensure American sugarcane and sugar beet farmers, processors and refiners can continue to sustainably produce safe, affordable food here at home."