

Handbook of Florida Fence and Property Law: Fence Contracts¹

Michael T. Olexa, Jeffery Van Treese II, and Christopher A. Hill²

Preface

With approximately 19,000 livestock farms in the state, along with horse farms; orange groves; croplands of soybeans, sugarcane, cotton, and peanuts; and many other agricultural and livestock facilities, livestock and farming have a significant impact on Florida's economy. Florida's agricultural economy has been required to coexist with rapid population and commercial growth in the state over the last twenty-five years. Conflicts between these interests bring prominence to issues such as the rights and responsibilities of adjoining landowners, farmers, and property owners in general. Due to the added importance placed on these areas of real property, the legal aspects of fences in the state of Florida have taken on significant importance.

This handbook is designed to inform property owners of their rights and responsibilities in terms of their duty to fence. Discussed areas include a property owner's responsibility to fence when livestock is kept on the property, the rights of adjoining landowners to fence, placement of fences, encroachments, boundary lines, easements, contracts, nuisances, and a landowner's responsibilities towards persons who enter his or her property.

This handbook is intended to provide a basic overview of the many rights and responsibilities that farmers and

farmland owners have under Florida's fencing and property law. Readers may value this handbook because it informs them about these rights and responsibilities. However, the reader should be aware that because the laws, administrative rulings, and court decisions on which this booklet is based are subject to constant revision, portions of this booklet could become outdated at any time. This handbook should not be viewed as a comprehensive guide to fencing and property laws. Additionally, many details of cited laws are left out due to space limitations. This handbook should not be seen as a statement of legal opinion or advice by the authors on any of the legal issues discussed within. This handbook is not a replacement for personal legal advice, but is only a guide to educate and inform the public on issues relating to fencing and property laws in Florida. For these reasons, the use of these materials by any person constitutes an agreement to hold the authors, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, the Center for Agricultural and Natural Resource Law, and the University of Florida harmless for any liability claims, damages, or expenses that may be incurred by any person as a result of reference to or reliance on the information contained in this handbook.

Readers wishing to find further information from the Florida Statutes may access those statutes online at <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/STATUTES/>.

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2. Michael T. Olexa, Ph.D., J.D. professor, Food and Resource Economics Department, and Director, Center for Agricultural and Natural Resource Law, UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL, and member, The Florida Bar; and Jeffrey W. Van Treese II, J.D., Ph.D. attorney with Zappolo and Farwell, P. A., in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, practicing commercial litigation and director of the Palm Beach Lakes High School Law Academy, member, The Florida Bar, and conducts research in horticulture, with an emphasis on tree hazard risk assessment.

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Fence Contracts

When entering into a fence contract or agreement, what do I need to consider so that I may avoid a future dispute?

For legal purposes as well as for clarity's sake and ease of recording, it is always better to have a written contract than a verbal agreement. A written contract provides you and your neighbor a better understanding of the intentions of all parties involved in the contract. In addition, it is usually easier to bind someone to a written rather than a verbal agreement. Although the list below does not provide a full list of everything that should be included in a written contract, the following elements should be included in any valid, legally recognized contract:

- The names and signatures of the parties
- A clear description of the lands involved and the terms that each party has agreed upon (e.g., who is to contribute what, maintenance responsibilities, the exact location of the fence, etc.)
- The date of the contract's execution
- At least two witnesses (preferably ones who have no interest in the contract and are not related to the parties) and a notary (identification of the signatories and attestation to the facts)
- The length of time that the contract will run or any ways it can be otherwise terminated
- Any methods for changing the terms of the contract in the future
- Damages and other remedies if one of the parties does not fulfill its agreed-upon obligations

See also Fla. Stat. § 695.01(1) (2021).

Summary

Court actions are always expensive and time consuming. To avoid going to court in a dispute, start with a written contract, ensure all vague terms are clearly defined, and verify that all parties have agreed upon the terms. While the above list is not completely inclusive, it should help provide some guidelines in making a contract. In the case where a dispute does arise, be reasonable and try to reach a compromise with the opposing party even if you think you

are right. Compromise and settlement are usually much more efficient and less expensive than court costs.

Further Information

Handbook of Florida Fence and Property Law
https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/entity/topic/BOOK_Florida_Fence_and_Property_Law