

IFAS Matters



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IFAS Matters - October 2012

Posted on October 15, 2012 by Jack Payne

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"Look, I'd rather be free, too, but at least we're not in a zoo anymore."

I voted this morning, but I can't say that it was easy. Our absentee ballots came in the mail last week and since I'm familiar with most the candidates, I figured that I would zip right through mine, pop it in the mailbox, and be ahead of the game. *That was until I got to the amendments.*

Unlike candidate selection, amendments demand that voters tackle complex issues. This year, Floridians have numerous constitutional amendments to ponder. Perhaps I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed, but I wasn't willing to fill in the amendment bubbles until I consulted a reputable, non-partisan source, the [UF/IFAS EDIS website](#), to make sure that I understood them. A series of fact sheets on explaining the amendments by Dr. Rodney Clouser, a professor from the UF/IFAS Dept. of Food and Resource Economics, are quite



150th Anniversary

Find out how the University of Florida is celebrating...

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Future of Water in Florida



UF's senior vice president for ag and natural resources discusses UF/IFAS water research, education and outreach. [View Video>>](#)

Land Grant - 2012



University of Florida Morrill Act celebration commercial. [View Video>>](#)

honored by Entomological Society

helpful in educating voters about these amendments. The fact sheets can be accessed by going to the EDIS website or simply doing a search for Florida amendments by Rodney Clouser.

As it turned out, I'm not alone. Making ballot questions readable was the topic of a recent study, "Ballot Readability and Roll-Off: the Impact of Language Complexity" by professors Shauna Reilly of Northern Kentucky University and Sean Richey of Georgia State University. The study explored whether the readability of ballot questions had an effect on voter participation. The authors analyzed 1,112 ballot measures from 1997 through 2007. They measured readability by applying the Flesch-Kincaid scale, a system that scores text according to the grade level of education required for comprehension.

It is interesting to note that:

- Many newspapers and magazines are written to a 9th grade level
- USA Today, New York Times, and the New Yorker are written to a 10th grade level
- John Grisham, Tom Clancy, Michael Crichton, and Stephen King, write at a 7th grade level
- Romance novels are often written at a 5th grade level

I wasn't surprised that the study found a direct correlation between the grade level of the ballot question and voter participation. ***Regardless of the topic, the measures that were written in complex language were voted on less frequently than those written in plain language.***

In addition, the authors of the study found that all ballots included in their survey contained language that exceeded that 8th grade reading proficiency and that well over half of the propositions analyzed fell into the graduate-school level or higher on the Flesch-Kincaid scale.

The biggest concern was that complex ballot language could confuse voters. Moreover, confused voters may end up casting a vote for the policy they don't want-or opting out of voting at all.

By the way, the Flesch-Kincaid scale for this column is 11.1.

Please vote!

-Jack

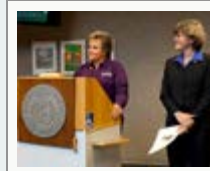
Features



UF Forms Oyster Taskforce

Responding to the oyster fishery collapse in Apalachicola Bay, UF/IFAS experts and Florida Sea Grant will join forces with seafood producers to find ways of restoring the oyster population. [Read more...](#)

Morrill Act Proclamation



Balser and Sanders were presented by Delaney and the commissioners with a proclamation that declared July 2, 2012, the "150th Anniversary of the Morrill Act" in Alachua County, Fla. [View Photo>>](#)

Small Farms Conference



2012 Florida Small Farms Alternative Enterprises Conference. [View Photo Gallery>>](#)

Articles

Laurel Wilt Disease



Laurel wilt disease not spread by fruit, seeds from infected avocado trees, UF researchers say.

Microbiology Wins Grant



UF-led team wins \$1.7 million grant to help minority students earn microbiology degrees.



Wysocki Named CALS Associate Dean

Allen Wysocki, a longtime UF/IFAS faculty member, has taken on a newly created post with the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, serving as associate dean for academic programs. [Read more...](#)



Endangered Rabbit Threatened

UF researcher Robert McCleery and a graduate student found that the endangered marsh rabbit's habitat was disappearing due to rising sea levels. [Read more...](#)

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UF/IFAS Solutions



EDIS – Florida Cooperative Extension Publications



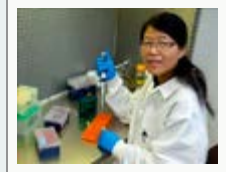
UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

Feral Hog Control



UF/IFAS experts investigating why feral hog control efforts often fail

Chromosome Development



Papaya study that sheds light on development of sex chromosomes