

Mecca Farms remains the best site for Scripps, notwithstanding the fact that the Florida Legislature voted overwhelmingly in support of placing it there in the fall of 2003.

In November of 2003, Governor Bush signed the law into place that would provide over a half billion dollars worth of economic incentives for the Florida expansion of the Scripps Research Institute. Taxpayer subsidies of this magnitude are not approved without expected returns on the original investment. The rush by some to place the Scripps permanent home at the site of their temporary home cheapens these returns.

Palm Beach County Commission Chairman Tony Masilotti exemplified this recently when he was quoted saying; "This is the cheapest and quickest way to do it. Do you throw out the good waiting for the perfect?" When taxpayer subsidies totaling over a half billion dollars are on the line, the answer is 'Absolutely!'

Only a few short months ago, all the partners were unified behind Mecca Farms and willing to wait for the "perfect" vision, regardless of any impending court decisions. While it was unfortunate that Scripps has been delayed at Mecca, attaining permitting approval is a matter of 'when,' not 'if.' Veering from a plan at the first obstacle is the definition of panic. Besides, I for one, would much rather see a Mecca Farms developed with Scripps than without it.

A split FAU and an undetermined county approved site parts ways with the intended 'campus' atmosphere and biotech cluster. If we are to expect Scripps to elevate the biotech industry in Florida to the renown of the Research Triangle in North Carolina or Silicon Valley in California, they cannot be asked to down-size and split right out of the starting gate.

The most blatant problem with creating a permanent home at FAU is the restrictive atmosphere. Two years ago, Scripps representatives enthusiastically opted for the spacious Mecca site because it was able to accommodate their every need. The objective was to find a tract of land on which they could grow on an "as needed" basis; an aspect that their California campus lacked.

In addition to setting Scripps up for dilemmas similar to those faced on the west coast, the current proposal jeopardizes the benefits Florida expects to gain from investing state revenue.

If FAU is to be the permanent home, will the University be able to fully expand and develop all planned graduate and undergraduate programs? Will FAU's exclusivity with Scripps hinder other state institutions such as UF or FSU from remaining involved? One of this investment's greatest rewards was to allow the entire university system access to joint research programs.

Will biotech companies and spin-offs be as willing to relocate here without the synergetic biotech cluster that Mecca could provide? I guarantee that spending taxpayer dollars on a stand-alone 30 acre site would have met resistance had it been originally proposed. The Florida Legislature approved this funding based on Scripps at Mecca and never once considered abandoning the 8 million square feet for the biotech cluster. To this day, the Palm Beach County Commission has appropriately voted the same way.

It is my hope that any future decisions by the commission will be made with the same commitment to the overall vision. Looking for a quick and easy alternative to expedite a project is unacceptable when the people of this great state have so much invested. We must continue to base the future of Scripps on the prosperity of tomorrow rather than the apprehension of today.