

Commissioner Adam Putnam's Department [Recovers More Than \\$3 Million](#) for Floridians in 2015

January Tip: Be Vigilant When Entering Gym Contract

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam H. Putnam announced that in 2015, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services recovered more than \$3 million on behalf of Florida consumers as part of its consumer protection efforts. Additionally, the department has ranked the top 10 complaint categories in 2015. While Do Not Call complaints continue to occupy the number one slot at 16,600, overall complaints decreased in that category by 9% when compared to 2014 complaint numbers.

“We are dedicated to protecting consumers, and I'm proud that we recovered more than \$3 million for Florida's consumers in 2015,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Adam H. Putnam. “I encourage anyone who suspects deceptive or fraudulent business practices to contact us at 1-800-HELP-FLA or FreshFromFlorida.com. Also, consumers can find educational information and ways to research businesses by visiting our website.”

In 2015, consumers filed more than 38,000 complaints with the department's consumer assistance center. The top 10 complaints were:

1. Do Not Call — 16,600
2. Fuel/Petroleum — 1,631
3. Cable — 1,431
4. Motor Vehicle Repair — 1,386
5. Landlord/Tenant — 1,364
6. Communications — 1,330
7. Medical — 1,296
8. Motor Vehicle/Sales Accessories — 1,197
9. Credit/Banking — 1,014
10. Travel/Vacation Plans — 1,004

In addition to complaints filed, the department's consumer assistance center responded to approximately 206,000 calls, more than 7,000 emails and nearly 10,000 online chats from consumers.

The department offers consumers seeking a gym membership the following tips:

- Make sure the gym is currently registered with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services;
- Contact the consumer protection and information hotline by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) to see if any complaints have been filed against the gym, and if so, how they have been resolved;

- If long-term memberships are offered, the contract must contain provisions allowing the contract to be canceled within three business days, excluding weekends and legal holidays; and
- If a gym closes or moves its facilities more than 5 miles away, it must provide access to an alternate facility of equal quality within 5 miles of its original location at no additional cost to its members.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is the state's clearinghouse for consumer complaints, protection and information. The call center is staffed with trained analysts who can respond to questions about programs and regulations under the department's purview and provide information on a wide variety of topics or direct callers to the appropriate government agency.

Consumers who believe fraud has taken place can contact the department's consumer protection and information hotline at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352) or, for Spanish speakers, 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832).