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UF/IFAS Extension *Comings and Goings* is a monthly newsletter distributed by the Office of the Dean for Extension via e-mail and on the UF/IFAS Extension web site at <http://extadmin.ifas.ufl.edu>. If you have any suggestions or would like to submit your own recognition or short article of interest, please send them to Valkyrie Aldrnari. Please feel free to also forward any questions or comments about this periodical to Valkyrie Aldrnari at valkyriea@ufl.edu.

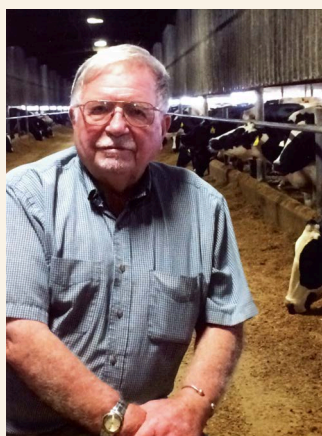
UF/IFAS Extension
Comings & Goings
 FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DEAN FOR EXTENSION



A Message from Scott Angle

J. Scott Angle, Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources

Local Dairy Farmer Gives Back to 4-H



Don Bennink

Every spring, a swarm of children, some not even 10 years old, cart away tens of thousands of dollars' worth of Don Bennink's cows with no more collateral than a pledge to bring them back within 48 hours.

This annual rite of spring for 4-H'ers and FFA'ers has been happening at **North Florida Holsteins** for so long that Bennink can't get more precise than "about three decades." 4-H mom Jo Sullivan says simply, that in Gilchrist County, "It's a *thing*."

For Bennink, this is part of providing for the future of agriculture. It's about giving kids opportunity. It's also about keeping promises. It's about taking responsibility for what's been put in your care.

It was a thing nearly 20 years ago, too, when Lauren Ellison was coming of age. Although she was in 4-H "straight out of the womb," she said, hosting a heifer at home was not an option.

Ellison enrolled in Bennink's program, called the free-lease agreement because of its price tag. Bennink's staff mentored her and her peers as they walked, washed, clipped, fed, learned the body parts and refined their showmanship skills.

At her first show with a Bennink heifer, Ellison got pushed around the ring by an animal 10 times her weight. Part of the experience, Bennink says, is the opportunity to fail and then to come back.

Ellison came back every year through high school. She got so good at handling heifers that Bennink offered her a job teaching the 4-H'ers and FFA'ers. Today she's in a dairy career at Suwannee Valley Feeds in Trenton.

The free lease program is Bennink's service to the industry, just like his participation on the Florida Farm Bureau Dairy Advisory Committee is. It's part of what has made him an agriculture legend, a **Florida Ag Hall of Famer**, a lawyer-turned-dairyman who opens his

farm to youth, to veterinary school interns and to graduate students from around the world.

Florida 4-H agent Jessica Altum Cooper enlists 4-H'ers in the free lease program. She teaches showmanship, like how to dress and how to keep to the dairy's feeding schedule when a cow is in your care.

Altum Cooper connected Jo Sullivan's daughter Cayce to North Florida Holsteins. Cayce earned the trust of a Bennink cow through weeks of halter training and grooming to earn the privilege of taking the cow to the [Suwannee River Youth Livestock Show and Fair](#) at age 9.

She was thrilled to compete and couldn't wait to do it again. For the next three years though, injuries (none of which occurred at Bennink's dairy, nor at 4-H) kept Cayce from

participating in the free lease program. They did not keep her from winning ribbons at the fair.

Altum Cooper identified other opportunities for Cayce to compete. Cayce won a blue ribbon for her iridescent photo of a mushroom. She won another for her buttermilk biscuits.

This year, Cayce returned to the ring, health and competitive spirit intact. Her Bennink cow won first in class, and Cayce placed third in showmanship.

Cayce is only 13 years old. If she had to choose a career now, it would be as a veterinarian. But she says she doesn't want to choose—she wants to do everything. One choice is clear, though. She'll choose 4-H and Bennink's generosity for years to come.

Extension Agent Helps Small Business Thrive



Left to right: Katherine Allen, Marion Cason Gross, Kerri Hart, Janet Myers, Steve Myers

A 50-year-old restaurant in Live Oak nearly closed because of one bad hour. For the first time she could ever recall, Marion Cason Gross failed an exam she needed to pass to keep cooking.

Katherine Allen sees it as her job to create—or in this case save—other jobs. She got to work getting Cason Gross back to work.

As a family and consumer sciences agent for UF/IFAS Extension Suwannee County, Allen has led a [communitywide effort to plan](#) for its economic future. Her office also prepares people to pass certification tests to get or keep jobs. It's her mission to keep Suwannee working.

Closing Ms. D's Kozy Korner would mean another vacant storefront in a rural community that already had too many. In addition to losing her

business, Cason Gross would lose her job, and so would the people who cooked, cleaned and served. It would also mean the vanishing of retirement income for the 73-year-old Cason Gross and the 91-year-old mother for whom she cares, Dorothy D. McMillian, the original Ms. D.

To pass the exam and avert this personal economic disaster, Cason Gross needed not just a study buddy but a motivational coach. Allen turned out to be both.

Allen did what UF/IFAS Extension does every day in every Florida county—assemble and share evidence-based information. Cason Gross, a third-generation restaurateur known as “Ms. Marion,” had used outdated library books to study. Allen knew exactly what Food and Drug Administration Food Code information Ms. Marion needed and invited her to the Extension office in downtown Live Oak.

Ms. Marion doubted herself, but Allen convinced her that passing the exam was a matter of putting in the hours of preparation. Ms. Marion heeded the advice. She made her own food

safety flash cards and had her mother quiz her as they drove to doctor's appointments.

On exam day, Ms. Marion had the jitters. Allen gave her a small gift. The keychain had a miniature dinner plate on it. It reminded Ms. Marion not only why she needed to pass but that someone cared that she passed the test.

A few days later, Allen called Ms. Marion with her passing score. They both shouted out loud. The restaurant would stay open.

That meant continued employment for Kerri Hart, who worked the takeout window. She lived with her mother Janet Myers in Live Oak. Janet is a talented cook, and the oxtail and curry chicken on the Ms. D's menu came from her kitchen.

Ms. Marion announced her retirement last year and her intention to sell. Kerri had an idea to keep it in Ms. D's family and to reunite her own.

Kerri's father Steve Myers worked as a waiter at Disney World. It was good enough money that it had for 24 years kept him and Janet from taking the risk of opening their own Jamaican restaurant. There were already so many in Orlando. They had seen friends' dreams dashed by failed restaurants. Certainly, the middle of a pandemic was no time to launch a restaurant.

Ms. D.'s didn't have the sparkle of Disney, nor the tourist traffic. But they could rent instead of buying, they wouldn't have to invest in kitchen equipment, and no one else they knew of had a Jamaican restaurant in Suwannee County.

Steve quit waiting tables and moved back home, Janet moved out of her kitchen and into Ms. D.'s, and Kerri kept

working the takeout window. [Janet's Jamaican Cuisine](#) was born. Business is good enough that in the fall they hope to expand with outdoor dining and hire people—creating jobs—to wait on customers. Allen is now preparing Janet for the food safety exam.

Beyond creating jobs and buying local, a successful restaurant also gives its owner the capacity to support

local charities or to simply express appreciation. Ms. Marion sent Allen a \$20 bill. Tips, after all, are part of the restaurant economy.

Allen doesn't work for tips. She works for taxpayers. She returned the gift.

For all the good that UF/IFAS Extension and public science do for a local economy, there's some money that should never change hands.

Agriculture and Natural Resource Programs

Saqib Mukhtar (Associate Dean for Extension), Shirley Baker, and Maia McGuire (Associate Program Leaders)

One Door Closes, Another One Opens

Maia McGuire, Associate Program Leader and EA IV, PhD

I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to partner with Dr. Holly Ober since November 2019 in our joint roles as Associate Program Leaders for UF/IFAS Extension, reporting to Dr. Mukhtar. Most of you know that my role focuses on marine and coastal Extension, while Dr. Ober's covered other areas of natural resources Extension. On June 1, 2021, Dr. Ober moved into a new role as the Program Leader for Forestry and Natural Resources Extension at Oregon State University, where both she and her husband completed their PhDs. We are very excited for her as she takes on this new challenge and are thankful for all of her contributions to UF/IFAS Extension! I will miss having her as my collaborator but look forward to continuing to touch base with her as friends. I've already warned her that I have her on speed dial in my cell phone, and we're making plans to meet up at ANREP in 2022.

Prior to 2019, Dr. Ober and I had not worked together, but we quickly found that as APLs we made a good team. She looked at things from the specialist's perspective, while I see them through the agents' lens. She was in the Department of

Wildlife Ecology and Conservation while I am affiliated with the School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences. We were learning new responsibilities at the same time, and so were frequently texting, emailing or Zoom-meeting each other with questions about things like the process for approving EDIS documents or picking each other's brain when we received requests for information or speakers related to specific topic areas.

It is said that when one door closes, another opens. I am very excited that Dr. Shirley Baker is stepping into the role of APL for natural resources Extension. Dr. Baker is an associate professor in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences (in FFGS). At UF, she led the development of the Marine Sciences undergraduate major, is the undergraduate coordinator in Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences and served as the chair of the UF/IFAS Faculty Assembly, just to name a few of her accomplishments. I look forward to working with Dr. Baker in her new capacity as we continue to build and strengthen UF/IFAS Extension's natural resource programming.

Reporting Invasive Species Affecting Plants

- The UF/IFAS faculty is responsible for reporting diseases, insects, weeds, nematodes, or any other invasive species to the Florida Department Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry (FDACS, DPI).
- Reporting this information is essential to protect Florida agriculture, communities and natural areas.
 - » Questions regarding reporting to FDACS, DPI should be directed to:
Dr. Leroy Whilby, Bureau Chief-Entomology, Nematology and Plant Pathology
352-395-4661 | Leroy.whilby@fdacs.gov
 - » Dr. Paul Skelley, Assistant Chief-Entomology, Nematology and Plant Pathology
352-395-4678 | Paul.skelley@fdacs.gov
- Samples of regulatory concern submitted to UF/IFAS diagnostic laboratories will be reported to FDACS, DPI.
- FDACS, DPI is responsible for announcing detection or establishment of new invasive species.
- Announcing the establishment of new invasive species can affect Florida's agricultural producers and trade of agricultural products.
- Reporting is a legal obligation under Florida Statute 581.091.

4-H, Families and Communities Programs

Dr. Michael Gutter (Associate Dean for Extension)

Here and Now in Florida 4-H

Stacey Ellison, 4-H Associate State Program Leader

Back by popular demand, Florida 4-H Summer Adventures is returning! Although many of our county 4-H programs are transitioning to face-to-face programs for Summer 2021, Florida 4-H will again offer a limited menu of virtual summer programs. These experiences include:

- Creator Guild (arts and creative expression)
- Seed to Food/Plant to Plate

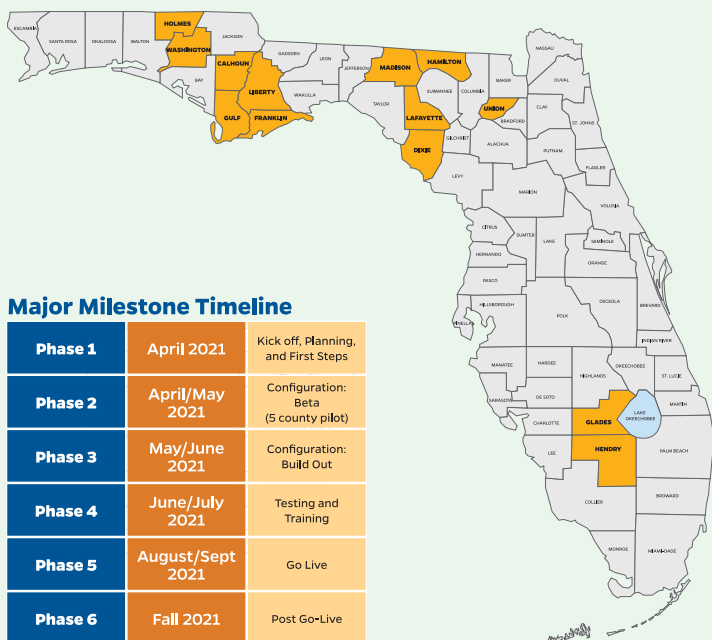
- Virtual Tailgate Camp
- US/Iraq Virtual Exchange
- Intro to Animal Science
- Culinary Arts
- Exploring 4-H Cloverbud Adventures

Complete information can be found at: <https://florida4h.ifas.ufl.edu/youth/camps/4-h-adventures-summer-program/>

Rural Telehealth Initiative

Dr. Michael Gutter

The initiative is headquartered at the UF Health Shands hospital system in Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida. Thirteen UF/IFAS Extension offices will serve as end-user sites:



Major Milestone Timeline

Phase 1	April 2021	Kick off, Planning, and First Steps
Phase 2	April/May 2021	Configuration: Beta (5 county pilot)
Phase 3	May/June 2021	Configuration: Build Out
Phase 4	June/July 2021	Testing and Training
Phase 5	August/Sept 2021	Go Live
Phase 6	Fall 2021	Post Go-Live

UF/IFAS Extension is working together with UF Health on an important project.

The **Rural Telehealth Initiative** is supported by a three-year grant from the USDA. However, if this effort is successful, there is a strong desire to expand and continue into the future.

Goal - Increase rural residents' access to health care by establishing telehealth kiosks at UF/IFAS Extension offices in 14 high-need rural counties. The Rural Telehealth Initiative aims to reduce this burden by making it easier for rural residents to see a health care professional who specializes in one of the following chronic conditions:

- Diabetes, including childhood diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Cancer

Telehealth Infrastructure - The Rural Telehealth Initiative will assess the efficacy of including telehealth infrastructure in County Extension offices. The telehealth infrastructure includes:

- Off-the-shelf kiosks (TytoPro) that connect patients with doctors in a virtual platform. Each kiosk includes a headset; a camera for visual inspection of eyes, ears, throat, etc.; remote diagnostic equipment including otoscope, stethoscope, basal thermometer, tongue depressor adaptor, pulse oximeter, blood pressure cuff; and iPad.
- Internet-boosting devices for counties with less-than-reliable minimum internet service, and VOIP phones for backup for audio connection.

Partners - Collaborators include UF Health, UF/IFAS Extension, UF Diabetes Institute, UF Health Cardiology and UF Health Cancer Center, as well as future local partners and stakeholders.

- UF/IFAS county Extension personnel will assist patients in accessing the telehealth kiosks, coordinating with technical support from UF Health, UF/IFAS, and the vendor when needed, and sanitizing the kiosks in between patient use.
- UF Health doctors, nurses, and scheduling staff will coordinate the patient telehealth visits.
- All partners will help advertise the availability of the telemedicine services and will meet regularly to discuss progress and resolve concerns.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Michael Gutter msgutter@ufl.edu

Meet Your Specialist

Alexandra Revynthi

Assistant Professor in Agricultural Acarology, UF/IFAS Tropical Research and Education Center



I came to the University of Florida from the University of Amsterdam where I received my Ph.D. in December of 2017 in entomology (acarology). My specialties are mite behavioral ecology, population dynamics and control but I also take special interest in ornamental acarology and entomology, IPM, chemical ecology and biological control.

I am the ornamental entomologist at [UF/IFAS TREC](#). My research focuses on developing Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs for invasive pests plaguing the ornamental industry in South Florida. Additionally, I aim at monitoring populations of established pests and develop environmentally friendly IPM programs to manage them. My extension program aims at increasing the implementation of IPM programs in nurseries and in the landscape.

Debra Barry

Assistant Professor in Agricultural Education, UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center



I came to the University of Florida from thirteen years as a high school agricultural educator and FFA Advisor in Manatee County, Florida. I joined UF in 2016 as an academic advisor at the Plant City location. I then moved into a Lecturer role 2016-2021 when I began my current Position. I am an assistant professor in the department of

agricultural education and communication. I am uniquely situated at GREC in Plant City where I also serve as the location coordinator.

My specialties include program planning and laboratory practices, as well as the mentorship and support of our in-service cooperating teachers who work with our student teachers. The student teaching capstone internship can have a huge impact on the trajectory of our preservice teachers into the profession of teaching agriculture. Mentorship and having

the tools necessary to support developing educators can make learning experiences much more positive and impactful. I hope to continue refining my skills as an educator with preservice teachers as well as those who work in mentoring relationships.

I am also interested in recruitment and retention, and lead a program called Ag Ed Institute. Ag Ed faculty members mentor program participants throughout the year. Participants also attend sessions in the fall and spring, where we help showcase the career of an ag teacher, while supporting students on their path to seamlessly transition from high school or a state college into our AEC department and CALS.

I am mom to 9-year-old Abby and have been happily married for 13 years to my husband Jason. We love living in west central Florida and having the ability to jump on I-75 or I-4 to get to most parts of the state relatively quickly. As a three-time Gator alum, I always enjoy trips to Gainesville for meetings and events. I feel very lucky to work with my colleagues in the AEC department, as well as those in Balm and Plant City. Even though I am a few hours south of main campus, I feel very connected to my peers and administrators.

As an assistant professor at a statewide location, I have a sincere interest in the programs that are affiliated with RECs in our state, as well as the important contribution these make to living out the Land-Grant mission. I think it's vital that we continue to offer educational opportunities to those who cannot access courses in Gainesville. As we like to say in Plant City, "Same education, different location."

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Panhandle Ag e-News

Doug Mayo, Livestock/Forages CED IV, Jackson County



In April of 2012, the first Panhandle Ag email newsletter was sent out to 1,652 farmers and ranchers in the Florida Panhandle, and the first article links were shared through Facebook and Twitter accounts. Since that time, 1,975 articles have been published, written by 66 Extension specialists and county agents on a wide range of topics related to commercial agriculture and natural resource management. Since this project began, the email subscription list has grown by 175 percent to 4,541 subscribers. Facebook account followers have grown to 2,443 and the Twitter account to 998 followers. The host [website](#) has received 1.8 million page views over this 10-year period. In 2012, the site averaged 29 page views per day; through March 2021 the site has averaged 1,281 page views per day, showing a growth of 4,317 percent! As the lead editor for this project, I have been amazed to watch the popularity of this service grow, but it would not have been possible without the contributions from the dedicated team of authors on a wide range of topics.

To celebrate this milestone of success, I thought it would be fun to share the 10 most popular articles that have been shared over our first ten years.



April 2012-2021

1. [Doveweed: a Growing Problem in Warm-season Turfgrasses](#) - (Ramon Leon, 2015) 43,450 views
 - » Doveweed is a summer annual weed that has become a serious problem in commercial sod production and residential lawns.
2. [Pasture Soil Fertility Essential to Prevent Broomsedge Infestations](#) - (Mark Mauldin, 2015) 33,340 views
 - » Broomsedge is a source of frustration for pasture managers because it is difficult to get rid of once it is established. Broomsedge is not competitive with improved forage grass species if conditions are favorable for the improved species.
3. [Hay Bale Size Really Does Matter](#) - (Matt Hersom, 2016) 32,845 views
 - » Because hay bales are generally sold by size rather than weight, there has been confusion about how much feed you are really buying. Dr. Hersom summarized data from Texas A&M that helps buyers get an idea of the weight of different-sized round bales.
4. [At What Weight Should I Sell My Feeder Calves?](#) - (Chris Prevatt, 2017) 32,080 views
 - » Evaluating the costs and returns for each incremental increase of weight gain will help you decide when to pull the trigger to send calves to market.
5. [Controlling Rats and Mice around the Farm](#) - (Mike Donahoe, 2016) 27,188 views
 - » Effective rodent control involves a three-step process. The first step is to “rodent-proof” the structure; good sanitation is step number two; the third step is population reduction with traps and baits.
6. [The “Bud Box” and Double Alley Design for Cattle Pens](#) - (Doug Mayo, 2015) 22,451 views
 - » The key to using the double alley and the “Bud Box” together is to keep cattle moving forward towards the chute, and not have the opportunity to circle back and get stressed.
7. [New Biosecurity & Interstate Transportation Requirements for Horses in July](#) - (Saundra TenBroek, 2019) 19,731 views
 - » This article about important changes to transportation requirements for horses out of state went viral on social media.
8. [What are the Requirements to Sell Eggs and Dressed Poultry from Florida Small Farms?](#) - (Doug Mayo, 2017) 17,843 views
 - » Popular article about the new Limited Poultry and Egg Farm Permit in Florida.
9. [Population Growing but US Farm Acreage Declining](#) - (Doug Mayo, 2016) 17,253 views
 - » According to USDA’s estimates, 6.6 million acres of US Farmland has been lost from 2008 through 2015. Having enough food for more than 9 billion people in the next 30 years will require significant investment in innovation, a major boost in both productivity and profitability, and doing everything we can to keep our current farmland in production.
10. [When is Hay Dry Enough?](#) - (Dennis Hancock, 2015) 17,074 views
 - » The truth is that hay is never completely dry, and it is full of microscopic life. If the hay is not dry enough, those microscopic life forms can cause major problems.

Tailgating Together

Katelyn Mulinix, 4-H EA I, DeSoto County



Charlotte/DeSoto County 4-H Tailgating Camp participants are ready to grill.

After a year of not offering face-to-face 4-H opportunities, DeSoto and Charlotte County 4-H were successful in offering a Tailgating Day Camp to 9 youth, ages 11-18. As the surrounding area has begun to offer more opportunities for youth, the agents identified the need to offer a small group day camp

over the scheduled spring break. Although families are looking for opportunities for their youth, we thought that the number of participants was not going to be what it was in years prior. To our surprise, the collaboration between agents resulted in a

successful day camp opportunity that quickly reached maximum capacity.

The one-day tailgating day camp introduced youth to the [Florida 4-H Tailgating Contest](#). Youth were also exposed to learning about where their food comes from, through classroom instruction and a field trip to the local processing facility. Eighty-nine percent of participants increased their understanding of where their food comes from and 45 percent of youth increased their understanding of retail and wholesale cuts.

As a result of the Tailgating Day Camp, 56 percent of youth reported that their confidence in grilling increased. Learning the basics of the 4-H Tailgating contest will better prepare youth to participate and successfully compete in the contest. Youth understand how to use a charcoal chimney to start their coals and the appropriate level of doneness for the four animal proteins allowed for the state contest.

Youth who attended the Charlotte/DeSoto County 4-H Tailgating Camp acquired the basic skills to be successful in competing in the 4-H Tailgating Contest.

Toxic Plants and Seven-figure Savings

Caitlin Bainum, Livestock EA I, Marion County



Fillies grazing on nightshade.

As an Extension agent, you can plan as much as you'd like, but you seldom know where the day might take you. To me, this is the fun part -- I enjoy the spontaneity of being a livestock agent. What started as a call from a couple of cutting horse enthusiasts ended in a potential multi-million-dollar savings.

I made a trip to Charlie and Denise's cutting horse operation where they wanted me to look for toxic plants before they brought home recipient mares that were carrying some costly, genetically superior embryos intended for the show ring. They wanted to be very sure their pastures were free of any hazards, most importantly toxic plants. The initial call to me was about [creeping indigo](#), a common toxic weed that they feared was in their pastures. Creeping indigo is like the cool kid in the leather jacket smoking a cigarette that everyone is afraid of, sometimes for good reason, but mostly because of hearsay. In Florida we have a multitude of toxic weeds; some are acute in their effects, meaning one involvement with them could be deadly and some are chronic, meaning repeated exposure could cause harm to the horse. I hopped in the golf cart with Charlie and away we went on their beautifully manicured 20-acre farm to look for creeping indigo, where I assumed I would not find much. I remember thinking that there is no way I would find an issue in these fields, as the

grass seemed well cared for and the place was immaculate.

My notion was correct for the most part, until we took a drive under the oak trees and along the fence lines, where I found many black nightshade plants and some lantana. Each of these might be unassuming to a horse owner if they do not know what to look for. The black nightshade is considered acutely toxic, being one of our biggest troublemakers in livestock pastures, arguably more of a concern than creeping indigo. Once we identified these plants, we pulled them up and continued our quest. Charlie asked to look at a neighbor's field "if I had the time". I always make time for golf cart rides around beautiful farmland with knowledgeable horsemen. Little did I know who these neighbors would be, not that it matters to anyone other than my inner equine fan girl.

The neighbors happened to be arguably one of the most well-known names in the Thoroughbred racing industry. This family has ties to four of the twenty horses that qualified for

the 2021 Kentucky Derby. Impressive when you consider the thousands of trainers, farms, and horses nationwide each vying for their spot in the 20-horse race. I provided the same service I would to any of my clients and began scanning the field for anything suspicious. I found black nightshade here as well, out in the open field and along the fence lines. In this pasture were two yearling horses, collectively worth more than seven figures. It

would have been just as much of a success story if these horses were worth five dollars, but this instance goes to show the potential cost-savings of minimizing encounters with toxic plants.

One week after my visit with Charlie, he called to tell me that he had all his pastures sprayed with the recommended herbicide and submitted a soil sample from each pasture for analysis. Upon receiving the results of

the soil analysis, he is ready to call on one of the ag service providers I gave him for our area to fertilize his fields appropriately. Because as I explained to him, his number-one line of defense against pasture weeds is a thriving Bahia grass pasture. And to my fan girl self, this farm visit landed me a trip to the racetrack to watch the best in the business train horses for a day. Being an Extension Agent may be underrated, but it's incredibly rewarding.

Risk Management and Volunteers are Always Top Priority

Maxine Hunter, Residential Horticulture EA I, Marion County



Construction on Marion County Master Gardener greenhouse retaining wall and benches.

UF/IFAS Extension Marion County Master Gardener Volunteers had been working to plan and fund the renovation of our greenhouse and nursery for nearly two years prior to the onset of COVID-19. They recently recovered the greenhouse and replaced our plant tables, upgrading them from old 2x4 benches to high-quality steel benches. We replaced all heating mats and fans. One corner of our greenhouse was washing out the walkway, creating a significant trip-and-fall hazard. To mitigate the risk, we immediately roped off this area and filled in any holes. We were then able to hire a local engineer to help us develop a plan. Working alongside him, we swapped some materials to keep cost manageable and eventually had a complete plan. It was intimidating to work within a limited budget and no personal construction experience to build a retaining wall with proper drainage to mitigate runoff. This was a major undertaking; our Master Gardener Volunteers pitched the project with agent and CED support to our Board

of County Commissioners. We were able to split the cost of the construction with them.

Then we had to wait for the new fiscal year to begin, for bidding to start.... And wham! COVID-19 shuts us all down. After another significant waiting period, we were finally able to identify a contractor and construction started in October of 2020. The project was slated to take 30 days; it was finally completed January 29, 2021! Once construction was finalized, our Master Gardeners took on the giant job of putting the area back together and preparing to resume some normal operations as permitted. Working in teams of seven two days a week, the Master Gardener Volunteers laid landscape fabric, replaced the structure for our shade cloth, and put in rows for our trees and shrubs. Our irrigation lines were rerun, with misting tables for younger plants and individual shutoff valves for each grow table. They immediately started over 800 vegetable transplants for our 4-H and school gardens. Since then, we have had tremendous response; our Master Gardener Volunteers have had over \$2700 in program support from plant sale transactions. We have stayed with an appointment-only basis in the greenhouse area and have hosted a couple of tours limited to seven per group. Following UF/IFAS and CDC guidelines has been a top priority for all involved. Many of the plant orders were placed by phone, which the Master Gardeners preloaded to be picked up curbside. Additionally, with vegetable seeds hard to come by during the pandemic, we were able to get donations and save seeds from Master Gardeners' personal gardens, which generated over \$1,000 in program support in 2021. This has already exceeded previous year's sales!

While certain areas, such as our hydroponic demonstrations, still need to get started up again, we are off to a strong start to 2021. The UF/IFAS Extension [Marion County Master Gardener Volunteers](#) welcome you to come visit our greenhouse, nursery and demonstration gardens anytime. Happy gardening!

Holmes County Leadership Summit

Kalyn Waters, Agriculture CED II, Holmes County



Beautiful Vortex Springs was a great location to host the Summit.

The UF/IFAS Extension Holmes County Director and the Holmes County Development Commission have collaborated to develop and host Holmes County Leadership Summits. These meetings are held quarterly at various locations around Holmes County.

The Holmes County Leadership Summit is a gathering of leadership in the county, including elected officials, department heads, business owners, agencies and stakeholders. The goal of these meetings are twofold:

1. develop collaborations and opportunities that will enhance our abilities as leaders to serve the residents of the county, and
2. serve as a platform for a round table discussion about opportunities and threats that are present in Holmes County and how we can capitalize or mitigate them.

The first meeting was held virtually in December of 2020. The second meeting was hosted at Vortex Springs in Ponce de Leon in April. The focus

of the meeting was addressing and discussing a plan of action for workforce development. Workforce development is the groups focus for 2021, with the topic arising from the CED's advisory committee.

During the April meeting, leaders discussed the need for workforce readiness among youth and how motivate the existing workforce to fill immediate needs. Action items were addressed and assigned within agencies and working groups to complete prior to the summer meeting.

This effort is spearheaded by the Holmes County CED to provide an opportunity to advance the county and foster effective leadership within the county.

Natural Resources Leadership Institute in the Time of COVID-19

Joy Hazell, Facilitation/Deliberative Engagement SSA III



Physically distanced, masked and bundled up for a NRLI plenary session.

In the summer of 2020, the **Natural Resources Leadership Institute** (NRLI), like many programs, was forced to rethink our 8-month program in the face of COVID-19. In normal years, up to 24 Fellows engage in intensive three-day sessions held in different parts of the state, each session focusing on a specific and contentious natural resource issue. Sessions include immersion in the issue/topic through first-hand experience with the resource; engagement with stakeholders from diverse institutions/organizations and perspectives; and practical, experiential training

in skills, concepts, tools, and strategies for effective collaborative decision-making, conflict management, communication, and negotiation. All of these facets traditionally involve close contact – sharing hotel rooms, small group work, traveling together in vans and sharing meals.

After much deliberation about the core experience of NRLI, brainstorming a variety of options, and careful study of the science of COVID-19 transmission, NRLI decided to move forward with six in-person sessions with strict adherence to UF and CDC guidelines, together with two online sessions. The in-person sessions required getting permission from UF/IFAS Extension for travel, as well as re-thinking how we conduct all in-person sessions and adopting strict protocols to protect Fellows and project team members from disease transmission. Protocols included:

- Single rooms (a budget strain, but a priority balanced out by the two online sessions)

- Holding all sessions outside (Fellows were provided camping chairs)
- Wearing masks at all times when not eating
- Maintaining social distancing, even during small group work
- Driving separately to sessions and field trips
- Rethinking meals

Determining protocols and best practices was relatively easy compared to operationalization. We purchased a portable wireless speaker and microphones to make sure we could be heard given the new distance measures. We reworked lesson plans to ensure physical distance was maintained. Our project coordinator had to plan meals and snacks to reduce touch and maintain appropriate social distancing. We sanitized all equipment before it was transferred between project team members or Fellows. We had to reconsider small groups, flip chart writing, and team-building activities. We met our guest speakers and stakeholder panel in online spaces from our hotel rooms, often dealing with not-so-great internet connections.

The learning curve was steep, flip charts were blown over, project team members had to learn to use a microphone, and everyone had to get used to wearing a mask for up to 14 hours, often in 90-degree heat. But in May of 2021, NRLI graduated 16 amazing Fellows who worked to overcome these limitations to build

a cohort, engage fully in sessions, and adapt on the fly to changing circumstances. The Fellows did all of these things while still internalizing the lessons of NRLI.

While each NRLI cohort asserts they are the “best class ever” and the project team agrees every time,

but we can assure you (and them!) that NRLI class XXI was the most unique cohort we have ever had the pleasure and honor of working with for eight months. Their experience of collaboration, overcoming obstacles, and willingness to have the best possible experience are examples of leadership in challenging times.

Comings & Goings

We would like to welcome the following newly hired and transferring faculty. These individuals were hired following a highly competitive search, screening and selection process. In some cases, candidates interviewed both on the UF campus in Gainesville and in a county Extension office. Selection was often difficult because we typically have two or three suitable candidates. These faculty are truly the best of the best!

New Hires

Luis Rodriguez Rosado, Agriculture & Natural Resources EA I, Polk County

Katie Jones, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Suwannee County

Claire Reach, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Calhoun County

Ashley Kush, Environmental & Commercial Horticulture EA I, Jackson County

Donna Cooke, Residential Horticulture EA II, Sarasota County

Robert Jones, Agriculture & Natural Resources CED III, Gadsden County

Kacey Aukema, Sustainable Agriculture & Community Food Systems EA I, Walton County

Gretchen Thornton, Family & Consumer Sciences EA II, Jefferson County

Gabriel Civari, Water Resources EA I, Marion County

Emily Beach, Agriculture & Natural Resources EA II, Lafayette County

Megann Cady, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Broward County

Chelsea Jones, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Marion County

Shayna Chewing, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Sumter County

Eric Reichel, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Orange County

Ashley Johnston, Life Skills & Wellness Digital media Influencer EA II, Duval County

Jessica Emerson, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Levy County

Transfers

Wael Elwakil, From Manatee County to Vegetable Crops EA II, Hillsborough County

Ashley Gill, From 4-H YD EA II to 4-H Youth Development CED II, Highlands County

Wendy Lynch, From Putnam County to FCS/Food Systems RSA III, Central District

We would like to wish the following agents the best of luck in their future endeavors.

Departures

Karen Rice-David, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Broward County

Sarah Bostick, Sustainable Agriculture EA I, Sarasota County

Clay Cooper, Agriculture & Natural Resources EA I, Citrus County

Bradley Burbaugh, Agriculture & Community Resource Development CED II, Volusia County

Darren Cole, 4-H Youth Development EA I, Indian River County

Sylvia Willis, Agriculture & Commercial Horticulture EA I, Suwannee County

Retirements

William Schall, Commercial Horticulture/Pest Management EA IV, Palm Beach County