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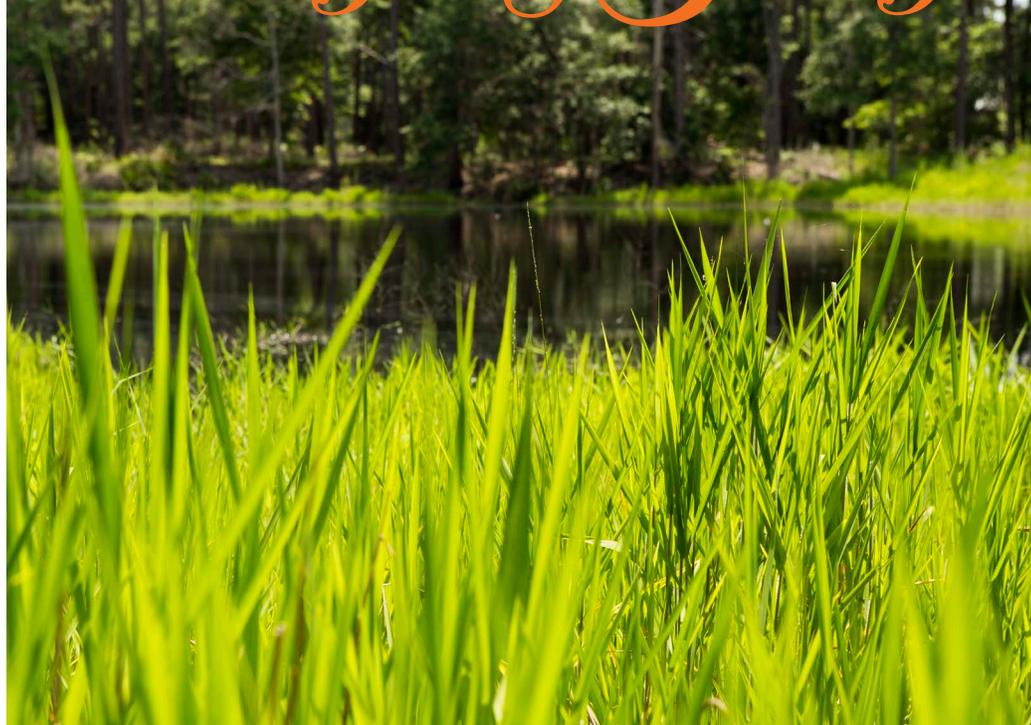


UF/IFAS Extension *Comings and Goings* is a monthly newsletter distributed by the Office of the Dean for Extension via e-mail and on the UF/IFAS Extension web site at <http://extadmin.ifas.ufl.edu>.

If you have any suggestions or would like to submit your own recognition or short article of interest, please send them to Valkyrie Shah.

Please feel free to also forward any questions or comments about this periodical to Valkyrie Shah at valkyrieshah@ufl.edu.

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



Pecan Grower Saves Water with Irrigation Schedule and Soil Moisture Sensors (pg 2)

Working with a grower, an agent helps to save water and strengthen state and local partnerships.

Teachers Dive into Water Curriculum (pg 2)

Curriculum offers budget-strapped science teachers training in water education.

Charlotte County Ag Tour 2017 – Do You See the Food? (pg 3)

This year’s tour included visits to a low-chill peach orchard, a citrus grove, a vegetable greens grower, a sod farm, and a working cattle ranch—all in Punta Gorda!

Master Gardeners Host Garden Tours at Beaches Museum and History Park (pg 3)

Where does sugar come from? How were plants used by early settlers and Native Americans? Master Gardeners answer these and other questions at the Beaches Museum in Jacksonville.

Water Quality Seminar Series in Charlotte County: Bridging Land and Water Educational Needs (pg 4)

A new water quality seminar series seeks to tie together what’s happening on land with the health of the estuary.

Florida Microplastic Awareness Project receives Champions for Change Award from University of Florida (pg 4)

Knowledge about the amount of plastic in our natural water bodies is inspiring people to change their habits of shopping and ordering in restaurants.

Teaming up! FREE income tax preparation and financial management education (pg 5)

For nearly 40 years, VITA has been educating people about personal finances while it saves them money on tax preparation. Now it’s reaching even more people thanks to innovative technology.

Extension Faculty Striving to Solve Wireworm Problems in Sweet Potatoes (pg 6)

When several growers noticed worm tunnels in their sweet potatoes, wireworms climbed to the top of the pest management priority list.

InZombiacs: Building Life Skills through Robotics (pg 7)

From scrap parts and expert volunteers, 4-H members in Marion County have built an unstoppable competitive robot team.

Wildlife Wednesday Webinars: Promoting Co-Existence with Wildlife (pg 8)

In Pinellas County, Wednesday isn’t just “hump day” – it’s also a chance for residents to learn about how to coexist with urban wildlife.

PECAN GROWER SAVES WATER WITH IRRIGATION SCHEDULE AND SOIL MOISTURE SENSORS

Charles Barrett, Water RSA II, SVAEC, Live Oak FL

Jim, a pecan grower in the Suwannee River Agricultural Area, approached me in October of 2016. He was researching soil moisture sensors because he was interested in getting a cost-share from the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD). As it happened, the cost-share program director for SRWMD and I had developed a relationship through the Suwannee River Partnership, and he pointed Jim in my direction.

I arranged a site visit with Jim to help him determine what his options were. When I got to his farm and saw that he had a weather station that had been cost-shared through FDACS, I convinced him to add soil moisture sensors to his existing weather station. This grower was taking advantage of two excellent programs designed to encourage BMPs.

We installed the soil moisture sensors and hooked them up to the data logger so that Jim can get online and view his data. This makes it easy for him to decide if he needs to irrigate, and he can simultaneously check the weather to see if rain is in the forecast. These layers of data come together to provide tools Jim can use to decide if he needs to irrigate, but then Jim has to decide how much water to apply.

I did some digging and found good pecan information from Georgia Extension and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 56). Using this information, I solved for crop irrigation demand and developed an irrigation schedule for the entire season (see also Chapter 3 in UF/IFAS Extension Vegetable Production Handbook). While Jim used to irrigate for two hours once a week, he now looks at his sensors, decides if he needs to irrigate, and then irrigates according to the schedule I laid out for him. I also explained to Jim that the soil in the depth of his rootzone can only hold about 30 minutes of irrigation, and any irrigation beyond that in a single event is a waste of water and nutrients. Now he makes multiple irrigation applications for shorter durations. The schedule gets Jim to the theoretical crop water demand and the sensors help him adjust for the difference between the theoretical and actual demand.

The successes of this story are numerous. Not only does Jim save water and reduce nutrient leaching potential, but it also results in strengthening the partnerships between the grower, SRWMD, UF/IFAS Extension, FDACS, and the Florida Farm Bureau.

TEACHERS DIVE INTO WATER CURRICULUM

Yilin Zhuang, Community Resource Efficiency EA I, Marion County



Density activity.

In 2016, a 4th grade science teacher named Mary wanted to do more interactive activities in her class of 22 students, but most science activity kits did not fit into her budget. She was frustrated and was wondering how

she could get her students involved in science classes. When she received the email notification about the science teachers training – Exploring Water Education Curricula—taught by the UF/IFAS Extension community resource efficiency agent, she was the first one to sign up for it. Mary was very pleased to have attended this two-day training. She learned how to observe the water cycle in a sandwich bag, how to illustrate the components of an aquifer, how to incorporate math into water conservation practices, and more. “I can’t wait to go back to school and show my students these activities,” she said. “They require minimum preparation and cost. I can just use my kitchen supplies.” Mary was one of the 22 teachers participating in the training program. Based on the program evaluation surveys, all of participants indicated that they “have improved the understanding of water education curricula as a result of this workshop” and would “share the

information with other teachers and students.” These teachers will reach a total of 1,122 students from 2nd to 8th grade during the 2016 school year. Research indicates that the train-the-trainer approach creates a multiplier effect, expanding the overall impacts of the program to reach greater numbers of people. Training the science teachers enables Extension to reach greater numbers K-12 students in a more time-efficient way.



Outdoor watershed activity.

CHARLOTTE COUNTY AG TOUR 2017 – DO YOU SEE THE FOOD?

Ralph Mitchell, Horticulture CED III, Charlotte County



Mr. Joel Beverly of XL Bar Cattle LLC explains the basics of cattle ranching.



Freshly-picked, locally grown collards from Patrick Farms/Robinson Fresh.

agent, and Dr. Mongi Zekri, UF/IFAS regional citrus agent. 55 participants learned about the local agricultural industry, its history, and how agriculture affects our economy, and saw first-hand the production efforts of local farmers in many diverse operations. This year's tour included visits to a low-chill peach orchard which produces the first peaches of the season on the east coast, a large citrus grove, a vegetable greens grower, a sod farm, and a working cattle ranch—all

Many people forget where their food comes from. It's especially ironic that in the United States, with the most abundant, diverse, safest and most inexpensive food in the world, agricultural activities are often out of sight and it's taken for granted that food comes from the grocery store, not the land. Agritourism is part of a recreational and educational outreach effort to increase people's knowledge about the importance of agriculture in their lives. In the past, urban residents often "escaped to the country" in search of a change of scenery and recreational opportunities. Today, agritourism offers people a front-row seat to see where their food and fiber comes from, not only increasing the appreciation for agriculture, but also developing advocates and better educated consumers.

The UF/IFAS Extension Charlotte County offered such an opportunity on March 21st. During the 2017 Ag Tour guided by Gene McAvoy, our well-versed UF/IFAS regional vegetable

in Punta Gorda! While traditional crops such as citrus and beef continue to thrive, new crops such as Australian finger limes are emerging as high-value commodities. Statistics from 2012 show that the total value of farm products sold in Charlotte County alone added up to at least \$103 million. Tour participants were able to not only become more aware of Charlotte County's agricultural "backyard" with on-site visits and dialogues with the farmers, but they also learned more about where their food comes from. A follow-up electronic survey was sent to participants to measure their feedback. One-hundred percent of those surveyed found that they increased their knowledge concerning the scope and impact of agriculture in Charlotte County. Through this experience, these participants became ambassadors for agriculture regarding a wide range of economic and resource issues. As one participant noted – "Enjoyed. It was a great learning experience."

MASTER GARDENERS HOST GARDEN TOURS AT BEACHES MUSEUM AND HISTORY PARK

Terry DelValle, Urban Horticulture EA IV, Duval County



Duval County Master Gardener teaches young visitors about the importance of gardening on a guided tour of the Beaches Heritage Garden

Where does sugar come from? How were plants used by early settlers and Native Americans? What did the earliest people eat along the mouth of the St. Johns River? These are a few of the questions that Master Gardeners quiz students about while on Heritage Garden educational tours. In 2008, Duval County Master Gardeners created a Heritage Garden in the Beaches Museum and History Park in Jacksonville Beach to demonstrate the historical development of agriculture in the Florida pioneer era. Since then, they have taken their mission a step further by offering hands-on, guided tours for grades K-4, focusing on comparisons of gardening then and now, how plants have been used in the past, how to compost with worms, the butterfly life cycle, a 1900 kitchen garden, and the story of sugar cane. Master Gardeners developed STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) lesson plans to match the Duval County School Science Curriculum for two age groups, K-3 and 4th graders. The young visitors are like sponges when they learn about things like how food can be composted by worms—plus they actually get to handle a worm! When Master Gardener volunteers see the looks of excitement on their faces as they pull up carrots from the garden, they know that their goal of creating future sustainable gardeners is making an impact.

WATER QUALITY SEMINAR SERIES IN CHARLOTTE COUNTY: Bridging Land and Water Educational Needs

Elizabeth Staugler, Florida Sea Grant EA II, Charlotte County



Dr. Katherine Hubbard from FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute explains red tide toxicity during a water quality seminar focused on harmful algae blooms in Charlotte County

In 2016, the Charlotte County Sea Grant agent and Florida Friendly Landscaping education/training specialist jointly began identifying educational programs that would link what's happening on land to the health of the estuary. This type of programming aligns with the county's strategic goals, and was identified by as being of critical importance by the county's deputy administrator during our 2015 county review.

To evaluate the water quality concerns and educational interests of Charlotte residents, the Sea Grant

agent developed and administered a 14-question Qualtrics survey. The survey was administered via email, social media, a website link on the county government homepage, and printed flyers located in public spaces.

There were 268 respondents who completed the survey between July 14 and 31, 2016. Although respondents were generally concerned about all water contaminants, the greatest concern was about herbicides and pesticides in the water, followed by harmful algae, bacteria, and human effluent. Respondents were most interested in learning about harmful algae blooms, Florida-friendly Landscaping, the water quality benefits of oysters and other shellfish, and water quality studies and results.

Based on respondents' concerns, interests, and preferred methods of learning, a water quality seminar series was developed for 2017. Topics were chosen to align with the interests or concerns of survey respondents and cover a broad mix of themes that bridge water quality from the land and water. Each seminar included two

speakers discussing a single theme such as harmful algae blooms or water reuse.

Four monthly seminars were offered during 2017, attracting 116 participants, including 21 county employees, 8 UF/IFAS Master Gardeners, and 8 UF/IFAS Master Naturalists. Of the 53 participants who completed end-of-seminar evaluations, 98% (n=52) indicated the seminar helped improve their knowledge and understanding regarding the subject presented; 96% (n=51) indicated the seminar improved their ability to educate others about the topic; and 98% (n=52) planned to use the information they learned. Examples of how respondents indicated information would be used included: In writing and public awareness; sharing on next-door neighborhood info exchange online; and sharing with co-workers and friends/family. A followup survey to evaluate the degree in which information has been used is planned for late 2017. Results will help to guide development of future water quality seminars.

FLORIDA MICROPLASTIC AWARENESS PROJECT RECEIVES CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE AWARD FROM UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Maia McGuire, Florida Sea Grant EA III, Flagler County



Microplastics training.

In September 2015, NOAA's Marine Debris Program provided an outreach and education grant to Dr. Maia McGuire (University of Florida/IFAS Extension) to initiate a statewide citizen science microplastics project. In April 2017, the Florida Microplastic Awareness Project was recognized with a "Champions for Change" Award from UF's Office of Sustainability.

Microplastics (defined as pieces of plastic that are less than 5 mm in size) are a growing concern in aquatic environments. The goal of the Florida Microplastic Awareness Project is to recruit citizen scientists to collect and analyze local water samples for microplastics. The data from this effort are being used to encourage people to reduce their production of plastic waste, in large part by reducing the use of single-use plastic items. Sixteen partners around the state serve as regional coordinators for this effort.

Microplastic, continued

Between September 2015 and May 2017, 999 one-liter water samples have been analyzed. Ninety percent of the samples contained at least one piece of plastic. On average, samples contain 8 pieces of plastic per liter, with 83% of those plastics in the form of microscopic fibers.

This information about the amount of plastic in our natural water bodies has inspired people to take action to reduce plastic waste. The Florida Microplastic Awareness Project is using community-based social marketing strategies to encourage behavior changes. These strategies include a pledge in which people are asked to indicate their willingness to adopt one or more of eight key behaviors. People can also indicate which behaviors they are already doing. Suggested behaviors include refusing single-use drinking straws, using washable cold and hot drink containers, bringing washable containers to restaurants to use for leftovers, and using reusable shopping bags. Other suggested behaviors are reading labels on personal care products (face wash, deodorant, makeup) and avoiding those containing polyethylene, and choosing natural fabrics rather than synthetics.

So far, more than 1,000 people have taken the pledge. Follow-up surveys of over 100 people show that on average they have adopted three new behaviors to reduce plastic waste since learning about microplastics. This effort is continuing to expand in Florida and through the Gulf of Mexico, thanks to grants from Florida Sea Grant and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (to Eric Sparks--MS/AL Sea Grant).

For more information about the Florida Microplastic Awareness Project, see www.plasticaware.org or contact Maia McGuire (mpmcmcg@ufl.edu).

Other UF/IFAS Extension faculty involved in the project are Rick O'Connor, Chris Verlinde, Laura Tiu, Lara Milligan, Abbey Tyrna, Shelly Krueger, Lisa Krimsky, Ana Zangroniz, LeRoy Creswell, and Holly Abeels. Yilin Zhuang and Shannon Carnevale are starting to investigate microplastics in Central Florida freshwater springs and lakes. By the end of the summer, all Sea Grant county Extension faculty will have been trained on microplastics sampling techniques.

TEAMING UP! FREE INCOME TAX PREPARATION AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Heidi Copeland, FCS EA II, Leon County

In the early 1970s, Gary Iskwowitz was a graduate student at California State University Northridge Botanic Garden, as well as a teacher of tax law while working for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Seeing a growing problem of questionable tax preparers who were scamming low-income people in his area, Iskwowitz proposed that he train a small number of like-minded student volunteers to go into the community to prepare free tax returns for underserved residents. Accordingly, people lined up around the block waiting for them.

The rest, as they say, is history! This college student-volunteer effort started the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. More than 40 years later, VITA is still working hard to promote and support a free tax preparation services for the underserved populations in both urban and rural areas, including the elderly and individuals with limited English proficiency. During income tax season 2016, more than three

and a half million income tax returns were completed through a VITA site nationally.

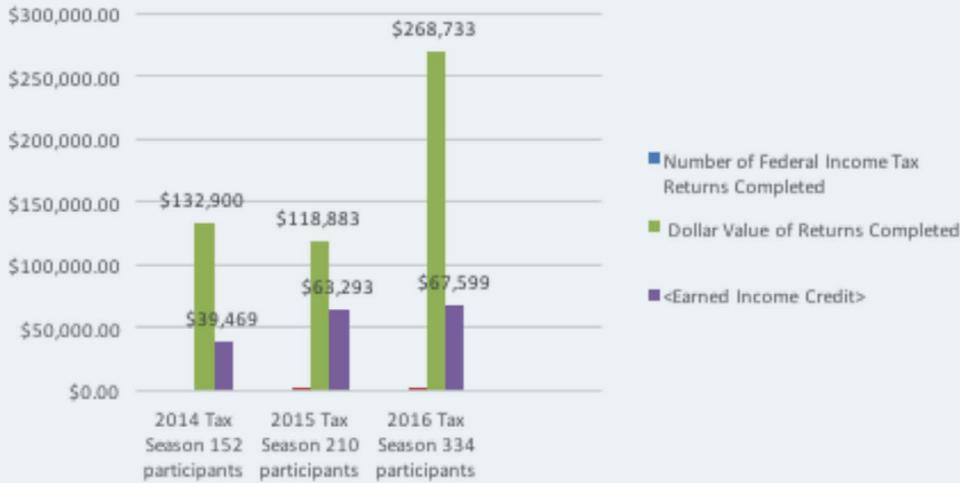
Just as in Gary Iskwowitz's time, the VITA program helps provide both a valuable community service and a powerful learning experience for the participants. Not only does a taxpayer get their income tax paperwork properly completed for free, but Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension agents educate VITA participants about their personal income taxes and money management issues, which in turn enhance family economic stability. Moreover, local economies benefit from monies spent (and saved) through taxpayer compliance.

For the third year, UF/IFAS Extension in Leon County has remained the hub site for a unique and innovative way of preparing income taxes. Skype software, which provides video chat and voice calls, is being used to help residents connect with VITA to prepare

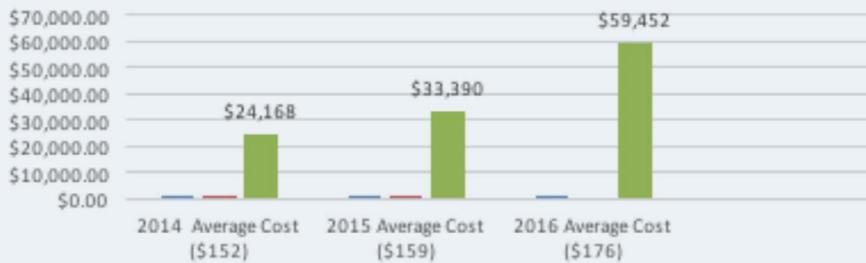
their taxes. It started in 2015 with seven rural counties in north Florida. In 2016, a few more Florida counties were added, and the program also expanded into southern Georgia. Currently, eight counties in North Florida and seven counties in Georgia are home to virtual VITA income tax preparation.

What makes this program so successful? Local Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension agents encourage participants to make VITA appointments. During the scheduled appointment time, FCS agents or volunteers assist the participants filling out an IRS-provided questionnaire. All pertinent tax documents are uploaded, then printed at the hub site where FCS-trained and IRS-certified Leon County volunteers prepare individual's tax return based on the intake information received and the face-to face Skype interview with the taxpayer. With signed participant permission, the tax document is either electronically filed or printed and mailed by the taxpayer.

Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA)



Average cost of preparing a simple income tax return according to National Society of Accountants (NSA)



Not only has the virtual VITA program increased in size and scope, but it has gained appreciation. In fall of 2016 the VITA effort (including Madison County’s staffed site) was awarded a small, two-year Internal Revenue Grant. Additionally, in April 2017 UF/IFAS was recognized by IRS Commissioner John A Koskinen at the Stakeholder Partnerships, and Education and Communications (SPEC) / Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) 2017 Virtual Partner Recognition Ceremony, as a nominee in three of the five categories acknowledged.

Although this year UF/IFAS did not take home the big prize, our clients certainly have! According to Thompson Reuters, VITA saves taxpayers a bundle of money in professional income tax preparer fees.

EXTENSION FACULTY STRIVING TO SOLVE WIREWORM PROBLEMS IN SWEET POTATOES

Robert Hochmuth, Vegetable Crops RSA IV, SVAEC Live Oak, FL



Wireworm damage in sweet potato

Wireworms, the larval stage of an adult click beetle, became a serious problem in Florida after sweet potato growers in North Florida increased acreage of this popular root crop (Figure 1). Growers hoped to take advantage of Florida’s climate to meet early season market demands and to utilize high quality water resources and deep sandy soils to grow several vegetable crops including sweet potato. But when several growers noticed worm tunnels in their sweet potatoes, wireworms climbed to the top of the pest management priority list. Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center Director and Regional Extension Agent Robert Hochmuth heard growers indicate that damaged sweet potatoes couldn’t be sold as Number 1 fresh

market produce, the most profitable market. “Growers told us specifically that if we couldn’t help them solve the wireworm problem, they couldn’t make a profit in North Florida growing sweet potatoes,” Hochmuth explained.

Growers had only a few insecticides and several cultural pest management options available, but repeated use of the major insecticide appeared to have begun to cause insecticide resistance in wireworms, said Norm Leppla, a UF/IFAS professor and Florida Integrated Pest Management coordinator. “In the past, we didn’t have a major problem with wireworms in the small acreage of sweet potato grown in the region, so very

Wireworm, continued

little research had been done on them,” he said.

Hochmuth and Leppla used funding from a Southern IPM Center IPM Enhancement Grant to test various wireworm trapping mechanisms at the Extension center in Live Oak to find a consistently effective trapping method. Several growers, eager to help solve the problem, also volunteered their fields for the study. The first step involved determining the wireworm species present and the risk of wireworm populations in a field. Hochmuth, Leppla, and county Extension agents Dan Fenneman and Keith Wynn placed the traps in fields where sweet potatoes were already planted and also where they had not yet been planted. “In fields not yet planted, we were trying to predict whether the field would be at high risk for wireworms the following season,

to help them avoid infested fields,” said Hochmuth.

The UF/IFAS Extension team also created a database of all sweet potato farms in Florida, to expedite communication among growers. The trapping methods will give Extension agents the information needed to tell growers which fields are safest for sweet potato planting and which are not. “This is a new problem, so we’re trying to stay ahead of the curve,” said Leppla. “We’re doing prevention, which is a major component of IPM.” The trapping project will give growers the information they need to avoid an initial wireworm infestation.

Now Leppla and Hochmuth are using a new Florida Specialty Crop Block Grant to continue to the next phase—finding ways to manage the pest for the long term. To stave off resistance to the only insecticide that controls wireworms, the researchers are examining other

management options, including cultural control and biological control, in addition to insecticide application timing to manage wireworm numbers without risking development of resistant wireworm populations.

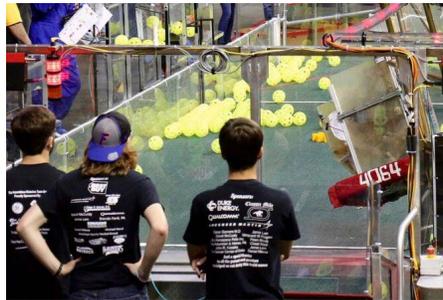
The past three years of work has identified the main two wireworm species (*Conoderus rudis* and *C. scissus*) attacking sweet potatoes in North Florida. This is an important finding because these two species are different from those found in other main sweet potato production areas such as North Carolina. The soil bait trapping methodology has also been refined to serve as a dependable way to predict the potential damage of wireworm in a particular field. This work has helped growers significantly reduce the damage of wireworm in their fields by an average of 25% and has resulted in stabilizing the acreage in the region.

INZOMBIACS: Building Life Skills Through Robotics

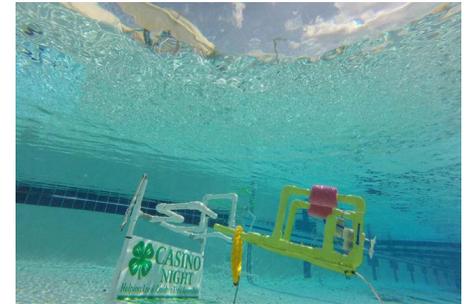
Ashely Stewart, 4-H EA I, Marion County



Team members are being interviewed by judges at the First Robotics Competition. Youth must be able to answer questions about how their robot works and why they have selected certain parts.



Drive Team members watching their robot climb a rope during the First Robotics Competition, signaling the end of a match.



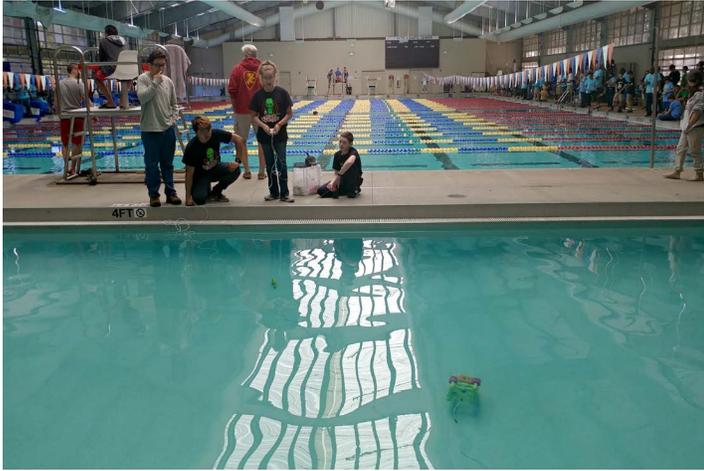
The InZombiacs SeaPerch ROV during practice.

The 4-H program in Marion County is a deeply rooted and traditional program. However, many people do not realize that this program has expanded to offer science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programming in areas such as robotics, rocketry, geospatial analysis, engineering and electricity. Marion County 4-H has a strong robotics program, offering youth the opportunity to learn about and build robots through Junk Drawer Robotics, Lego Mindstorms, and SeaPerch projects. Its success led to a need to further expand.

This year the 4-H program leader in Marion County partnered with Vanguard High School to establish a 4-H school-based club, but it soon evolved into much more. The club, made up of 20 high school students, would go on to become the

first Marion County 4-H competitive robotics club – the InZombiacs. Starting in January, club members worked tirelessly to build a robot and prepare for the FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC). This challenge allows youth six weeks to design and build a robot that could complete the FIRST Steamworks challenge.

The first life skill that these youth would learn was the wise use of resources. Unlike the other teams that the InZombiacs would be facing, their funds were limited. It is not uncommon for established FRC teams to spend \$10,000 or more on their robot, but that was not an option for the new 4-H club. Members had to become resourceful to make their robot a reality. The team worked with volunteers from Lockheed



Team members practicing during the Greater SeaPerch Jacksonville Challenge.

Martin, engineering students from UF, and local experts in the field to learn electrical and mechanical engineering skills to fabricate their own parts. Members collected scrap donations from local businesses, recycled old parts from existing robots, and even took apart a car at a local junk yard to salvage key components necessary to make a winching system that would enable their robot to climb a rope.

After 8 weeks and over 200 hours of work, the InZombiacs finished building a robot that could easily complete the challenge of collecting balls, releasing balls, picking up and unloading gears, function in autonomous mode, and climb a rope. Arriving at the competition in Orlando, the youth were uncertain of how their robot would perform compared to some of the professionally made robots they'd be competing against.

Here is where a few more critical life skills come into play. At the FIRST Robotics Competition, teams have to work together with other teams through alliances in each round, which meant these youth were learning teamwork and contributions to a group effort. Match after match, the team did well and gained confidence they didn't know they had. In the end, the InZombiacs made it to the finals for the first time ever and



Robotics Competition 2017

ended up finishing fourth place overall out of 63 teams that traveled from as far as Turkey to compete!

It didn't end there, though. The team decided they wanted to continue their robotics adventures. They proceeded to build a SeaPerch remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV) and competed in the Greater Jacksonville SeaPerch Challenge for the first time, where they placed ninth overall for the high school division. They also decided they no longer wanted to be a school club, but rather a community club, because they recognized the benefit of collaborating with other youth from around the county.

As a result of the partnership established with Vanguard High School, Marion County 4-H was able to enrich the robotics program in ways beyond what was ever planned. This program has allowed youth to enhance many life skills, such as resiliency, self-esteem, personal safety, marketable skills, communication, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making, in addition to what is listed above. One InZombiacs parent stated: "We've been doing robotics for a long time, but I truly believe the success that these youth have experienced is because of 4-H".

WILDLIFE WEDNESDAY WEBINARS: Promoting Co-Existence with Wildlife

Lara Milligan, Natural Resources EA I, Pinellas County

Shannon Carnevale, Natural Resources and Conservation EA I, Polk County

Bill is a waterfront resident in Central Florida who, like most waterfront residents, has a love-hate relationship with aquatic plants. While he cares deeply for the lake he lives on and the waterfowl that reside there, he was unaware of how important aquatic vegetation is to the ecosystem.

Waterfront residents often fear aquatic vegetation will attract undesirable

wildlife like snakes and alligators. But the truth is that aquatic vegetation is incredibly important to both wildlife habitat and the overall health of the aquatic ecosystem. Due to their ability to "filter" and remove human-added nutrients from fertilizers and stormwater runoff, aquatic plants are critical to long-term improvement of surface water quality and clarity.

In an effort to promote the co-existence of Central Florida's human and wildlife populations, UF/IFAS Extension Polk and Pinellas Counties have collaborated on Wildlife Wednesday Webinars (WWW), a series of educational webinars focused on urban wildlife and their habitat. Since 2015, eleven webinars have been offered, reaching 310 participants. These

webinars answer frequently-asked questions about native and invasive wildlife, examine how participants can learn to coexist with wildlife, and provide tips and tools on how to improve home yards to better support local wildlife with an emphasis on habitat needs.

Bill's neighbor, Michael, was a participant of these webinars. One morning in February 2017, Bill and Michael were discussing a floating vegetation island, which had drifted over to Bill's lakefront. Bill disliked the weedy appearance of the cluster of plants and asked Michael whom he should call to have it removed. Recalling what he learned as a participant in the "Creating Habitat Near Water" webinar, Michael knew exactly how to respond to Bill's question.

Instead of recommending a lakefront management company, Michael suggested that Bill leave the cluster of plants because it serves as great habitat for the wading birds that Bill enjoys watching and his wife loves to paint.

Several months later, in May 2017, UF/IFAS Extension Polk and Pinellas Counties sent out a followup survey to webinar

participants. It was on this survey that Michael shared the story of how Bill chose to leave the floating island of vegetation near his waterfront and how it has provided foraging grounds for wading birds, basking areas for turtles and young alligators, and likely, cooler water for fish to hide under.

As a result of participating in the WWW program, Michael had science-based information to promote co-existence with wildlife. Like Michael, 175 (78%) survey participants reported sharing information with their friends, family, neighbors, or colleagues. Other participants reported behavior changes such as planting native plants (53% of 103), reducing pesticide usage (47% of 66), and building or installing artificial habitat (27% of 88).

The success of these webinars has supported the launch of a third series of webinars that will start in June 2017. Information on the next series can be found online at polknr.eventbrite.com and past webinars can be viewed online at <http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu/NR/RecordedWebinars.shtml>

We would like to welcome the following new 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 new faculty are truly the best of the best!

ARRIVALS

Brittany Justesen, Ag EA I, Osceola County
Dallas Daniels, 4-H EA I, Lake County
Caitlin Bainum, Ag EA I, Marion County
Anne Elise Creamer, 4-H EA I, Clay County

NEW POSITIONS

We would like to congratulate the following faculty member on their new position:

Jim Davis, from Sumter County to Ag/Community Development CED II, Hernando County

UF/IFAS Faculty Support Giving



GIVE BACK

UF/IFAS County Extension Offices Giving



GIVE BACK