FACAA Mid-year Meeting and Professional Development Conference

December 9-10, 2025

Camp Weed Live Oak, FL



Agenda

(All times in EST)

Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025

11:00 am FACAA Board Meeting

12:00 pm Lunch

12:45 pm IST – Brett Bultemeier - Bulletins Live! Two Franta Majs – ANSERV

1:45 pm Membership Meeting / Farm Credit Young Professional Award Presentation

3:45 pm Presentations

5:00 pm Room Check-in/Break/Posters

6:00 pm Dinner

7:30 pm Committee Work (if needed)

Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2025

7:30 am Breakfast

8:30 am Tours – Full Circle Dairy

12:30 am Lunch – NFREC Tour/Hort Tour/Grazing

Presentation Schedule

Time	Exhibit Hall A: Title and Lead Author	Abstract Page Number	Exhibit Hall B: Title and Lead Author	Abstract Page Number
3:45 pm	Weed Identification In Action: Enhancing Producer Knowledge Through Hands-On Learning **A. Stonecipher**	**5**	Building Buzz Through Collaboration And Citizen Science: Regional Impacts From A Collaborative Pollinator Census Webinar **C. Sollazzo**	**6**
4:00 pm	Growing Blueberries In The Florida Panhandle: Bridging Research And Local Conditions **L. Goldsby**	**10**	Cut Flower Demonstration Garden Leads To New Opportunities **E. Harlow**	**7**
4:15 pm	Boosting Citrus Resilience: The Role Of Silicon In Reducing Temperature Stress Damage **L. Strange**	**11**	AI-BMP Taskforce For North Florida: First Steps To Using AI To Advance Agricultural Practices **T. Pittman**	**8**
4:30 pm	Finding Ways to Reduce Substrate Cost Through Using Compost And Substrate Stratification **L. Qingchu**	**12**	Small Farm Start-up School: Teaching New Beginner Farmers Business Planning and Crop Production **I. Vandamme**	**9**
4:45 pm	Sensory Evaluation Of Passion Fruit Helps Growers Make Informed Planting Decisions **M. Bailey**	**13**	Leveraging Social Media Content Creators To Strengthen Local Agriculture **M. Pinkerton**	**14**

Poster Presentations

Lead Author	Title	Abstract Page Number
C. Sollazzo	Evaluating Vermicompost Extracts For Root Health In Gardenia Production	**15**
H. Baker	Managing Cattle Enterprises Success: Advancing Knowledge And Practice Adoption Among Small-Scale Producers	**16**
L. Butler	Cooking Through Culture: Engaging Youth In Florida's History And Food Safety Through County Line Camp	**17**
L. Harlow	Cultivating Our Future By Teaching How To Grow Crops In Schools	**18**
M. Greathouse	Planting Extension Pathways: Hands-On Learning For Future DPMs	**19**
S. Samiei	Access, Need, and Place: Evaluating Community Priorities In An Urbanizing Nassau County	**20**
M. Ward	Meeting Community Needs With The Expanding Agriculture: Workforce Seminar	**21**

Weed Identification In Action: Enhancing Producer Knowledge Through Hands-On Learning

A. Stonecipher, UF/IFAS, Volusia County, C. Justesen, UF/IFAS, Marion County, T. Wilson, UF/IFAS, St. Johns County, A. Lazarri, UF/IFAS, Indian River County, M. Yoder, UF/IFAS, Brevard County

Objectives: Weed identification and management are critical components of sustainable pasture production and livestock health in Florida. Many producers struggle to distinguish between toxic, non-toxic, and invasive weed species, leading to potential animal health risks and ineffective weed control efforts. The objective of this Hands-On Table program is to increase producer awareness and recognition of common pasture weeds, both toxic and non-toxic, while reinforcing the importance of proper identification prior to management decisions. The program also aims to enhance understanding of herbicide labels to ensure the correct and safe use of chemical control methods. **Methods:** This was developed as an interactive educational exhibit featuring both live weed specimens and pictures. Educational materials highlight plant identification characteristics, toxicity potential, and invasive species concerns. The exhibit incorporates guided discussions and demonstrations on how to interpret herbicide labels, including identifying the active ingredient, target weeds, and appropriate application methods. This display has been featured at multiple Extension programs, including Pasture Management Workshops**,** the Equine Institute**,** Small Ruminant Short Course and Field Day**,** horse club meetings, and other agricultural education events. **Results:** Participant engagement and feedback have been very positive. Evaluations and participant discussions indicate increased confidence in identifying toxic and non-toxic plants, recognizing invasive weed species, and understanding label requirements for herbicide use. Attendees have reported applying this knowledge to improve pasture management decisions, reduce livestock exposure to toxic weeds, and select appropriate control measures based on correct species identification. **Conclusion:** This display table has proven to be an effective and versatile Extension teaching tool for improving weed identification skills and promoting safe, informed weed management practices. By combining visual, tactile, and discussion-based learning, the program reinforces key principles of pasture health, livestock safety, and responsible pesticide use. Its adaptability across multiple Extension events demonstrates the value of interactive, experience-based education in enhancing producer knowledge and promoting sustainable pasture management throughout Florida.

Building Buzz through Collaboration And Citizen Science: Regional Impacts From A Collaborative Pollinator Census Webinar

C. Sollazzo, UF/IFAS Extension, Manatee County, Palmetto, FL; J. Lebouitz, UF/IFAS Extension, Sarasota County, Sarasota, FL; T. Silvasy, UF/IFAS Extension, Hillsborough County, Seffner, FL; S. Van der Heiden, UF/IFAS Extension, Lee County, Ft. Myers, FL; and F. Hecker, UF/IFAS Extension, Sarasota County, Sarasota, FL.

Situation: Beneficial insect populations continue to decline across the southeastern United States due to habitat loss, pesticide exposure, and limited public understanding of their ecological and economic roles. Recognizing a need for greater awareness and engagement, UF/IFAS Extension agents in the Southwest District collaborated to develop a virtual program preparing residents for the Great Florida Pollinator Census. The 90-minute webinar, held July 15, 2025, aimed to (1) increase understanding of pollinator diversity and ecosystem services, (2) encourage adoption of insect-friendly and integrated pest management (IPM) practices, and (3) promote participation in citizen-science initiatives. **Methods**: Five Extension professionals planned and delivered the regional webinar through coordination meetings on Zoom. The team created promotional materials—including social-media posts, blogs, and Eventbrite registration—and provided participants with seed packets, stickers, IPM brochures, and census count sheets. The session was recorded and posted on YouTube for ongoing outreach. A post-program survey and follow-up evaluation measured knowledge gain and intended behavior changes. **Results**: 73 individuals registered, and 49 attended live. Of 36 participants completing the initial survey, 94% reported knowledge gain in at least 1 area: insects' role in ecosystems (85%), IPM (79%), pollinator plants (76%), and insect identification (62%). In the same survey, 81% intended to adopt at least 1 new behavior, most commonly planting pollinator-friendly plants (90%), sharing insect information (72%), learning more about pollinators (69%), and practicing IPM (66%). A 3-month follow-up (n = 15) found 71% had planted pollinator plants, 64% created or enhanced pollinator habitat, 57% practiced IPM, 50% pursued further learning, and 29% reduced pesticide use. 40% participated in the 2025 Pollinator Census, with another 47% intending to but unable to do so. **Conclusion**: The collaborative webinar effectively increased pollinator awareness and inspired measurable action across the Southwest District. Participant feedback reflected enthusiasm and practical application, underscoring the value of regional collaboration in amplifying Extension's impact on conservation and citizen-science engagement.

Cut Flower Demonstration Garden Leads To New Opportunities

E. Harlow, UF/IFAS Extension, Columbia County, Lake City, FL.

Situation: In 2023, the Columbia County Extension office received an increased number of inquiries about cut flower production. Questions were from a mix of current flower farmers, aspiring farmers, and backyard cut flower gardeners. With limited resources and experience, the horticulture agent decided to plant a cut flower demonstration area. This new space allowed agents to change the way classes were taught and provide new opportunities for stakeholders. The objective was to provide a space for stakeholders to experience different cut flowers and growing methods in real-time. The garden was fully realized in 2025 after participation in national cut flower trials. This presentation will cover how the demonstration garden was created, programs realized as a result, and how other offices can install a similar garden. **Methods:** The Columbia County Extension Office has 320 sq. feet of demonstration garden space for cut flowers. Flowers are rotated through based on growing season. Currently, the garden is divided into 3 seasons: cool season/bulbs, national trials in spring, and fall. As a result, different classes are introduced based on the type of flowers. Classes range from hands-on planting, bulb, backyard growers, floral design, field days, and Small Farms Academy workshops. **Results:** In 2025, over 43 different types of cut flowers were grown on-site. Seven workshops were provided either at or about the gardens to 241 individuals. This included a field day for Master Gardener Volunteers and a small farm academy. **Conclusion:** Many offices have inquired how they too can begin to incorporate cut flowers into their demonstration gardens. This presentation will give agents a chance to see how it can be achieved, some of the pitfalls to avoid, educational opportunities, and how to be successful.

AI-BMP Taskforce For North Florida: First Steps To Using AI To Advance Agricultural Practices

Tyler Pittman, Ph.D., UF/IFAS Gilchrist County Extension, Trenton, FL , Marnie Ward, Ph.D., UF/IFAS Citrus County Extension, Lecanto, FL , Dana Choi, Ph.D., UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Balm, FL, Ziwen Yu, Ph.D., UF/IFAS Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Gainesville, FL, Eric Simonne, Ph.D., UF/IFAS Northeast Extension District, Gainesville, FL , and Jae Ahn, Ph.D., UF/IFAS Agriculture Education and Communication, Gainesville, FL

Situation: Artificial Intelligence (AI) in agriculture is a rapidly growing field aimed at increasing production efficiency, crop yields, and sustainable use of resources. In Florida, many producers, industry representatives, agencies, and universities are working to increase production efficiency in the hopes of conserving water quality and quantity. To this group, AI can and will be a helpful tool to accomplish water conservation goals through improved production efficiency and establishment of best management practices (BMPs). **Methods:** We developed an AI-BMP Taskforce composed of farmers, agriculture industry representatives, and university extension and researcher faculty to begin to bridge the gap from AI theory to practical on-farm tools. This taskforce began by hosting a workshop to hear from professionals in the field and to better understand the role of AI for BMPs in agriculture. The initial efforts of the taskforce have highlighted the following primary challenges and opportunities for increasing AI adoption in farming. **Results:** Farmers are most concerned with economic viability, administrative burdens, weather unpredictability, and labor shortages, while AI adoption is hindered by issues of reliability, cost, trust, and data accessibility. However, the strong interest in AI expositions and field days, hands-on demonstrations, and centralized resources indicates a need for practical, user-friendly AI solutions tailored to real-world agricultural challenges. To drive AI adoption, stakeholders must focus on improving AI reliability, demonstrating clear financial benefits, and building trust through transparent data practices. Additionally, providing accessible training, beginner-friendly guides, and tools specifically designed to address farming challenges will help bridge the gap between technology and agricultural operations. **Conclusion:** By fostering collaboration among farmers, industry leaders, and researchers, and ensuring AI solutions align with real-world needs, we can accelerate AI adoption and enhance efficiency, sustainability, and profitability in agriculture.

Small Farm Start-up School: Teaching New Beginner Farmers Business Planning And Crop Production.

I. Vandamme, UF/IFAS Extension, Manatee County; L. Rodriguez, UF/IFAS Extension, Polk County; J. Ryals, UF/IFAS Extension, Collier County; D. Outerbridge, UF/IFAS Extension, Lee County; J. Hagen, UF/IFAS Extension, Lee County; A. Williams, UF/IFAS Extension, Hillsborough County; K. Gill, UF/IFAS Extension, DeSoto County; A. Mashole, UF/IFAS Extension, Walton County; K. Stauderman, UF/IFAS Extension, Volusia County; A. Stonecipher, UF/IFAS Extension, Volusia County; D. Treadwell, UF/IFAS Extension and Horticultural Sciences; and D. Campbell, UF/IFAS Extension, Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises.

Situation: Farmers that earn less than $350,000 annually meet a typology that identifies them as a "small farmer" (USDA ERS). Over 81% of the 47,703 farms in Florida generate $99,999 or less in sales and obtain the majority of household income off-farm (USDA NASS, 2022) (ERS, 2024). In addition, 50% of agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting businesses fail within ten years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Extension program support of productive farms has the potential to increase sales of Florida-grown agricultural products, protect natural resources, and provide regional food systems resilience. According to a survey of Florida farmers conducted in early 2025, the most important educational topics were: marketing and sales, value-adding and revenue diversification strategies, new technology and production methods, and farm finances and business management. **Methods:** A hybrid in-person/online course that taught business and production practices was created by the UF/IFAS Extension Agriculture Agent in Sarasota County from 2021-2024 for Sarasota County clients. Before his retirement in 2025, the agent transitioned the program to the Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises team, which made subsequent improvements based on survey results. The Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises team maintained and enhanced the content, format, and evaluation methods for the eight-week program, which consisted of three in-person farm tours, 6 online classes, quizzes, and materials stored via Canvas, and a farmer panel. Students created and received feedback on a business plan throughout the course and learned about business management, crop and livestock production, agritourism, and regulatory information. **Results:** From October to November, 2025, 13 clients from 7 counties participated and self-reported an average of 1.69 off-farm revenue streams, and were interested in producing livestock, flowers, produce, fruit, and/or honey. Weekly quizzes assessed knowledge gain each week, with a correct answer rate of 77% and 87% for the first two weeks. Post-course evaluation and 6-month follow-up surveys will be administered with the goal of improving next year's course content and delivery, expanding into other counties, and helping participants make informed decisions. **Conclusion:** This program is being expanded to other counties in 2026 and will represent the first state-wide program focused on business and marketing developed for the Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises team to date. Success will be measured with surveys to measure knowledge gain and behavior change, with an overarching goal of increasing informed decision-making.

Growing Blueberries In The Florida Panhandle: Bridging Research and Local Conditions

L. Goldsby, UF/IFAS Extension Bay County, Panama City, FL

Situation:
Blueberries grow differently than most traditional horticultural or agronomic crops, with low pH requirements and a preference for ammoniacal rather than nitrate forms of nitrogen. Florida blueberry production-- and in turn, breeding efforts and research, are focused on low-chill, southern highbush production systems, which occur primarily in the central and southern parts of the state. In the Panhandle, environmental conditions differ. Because of the potential for late freezes, rabbiteye blueberries, which flower later and are native to the area, are recommended. This can leave local growers and homeowners with limited species and region-specific guidance. By introducing the history of blueberry domestication, I highlight the concept of crop-specific growing conditions and reinforce the information with data and field images. The goal of this program was to share practical, research-based information about how to grow blueberries in the Panhandle of Florida. **Methods:** A presentation titled *All About Blueberries* was developed to introduce best management practices for backyard blueberry growers and small producers. The program has been delivered twelve times at Extension workshops and various club meetings, reaching roughly 260 audience members. The class uses a visual presentation, discussion, and a handout outlining yearly timing of fertilization and pruning management practices to disseminate information. **Results:** Participants consistently reported increased understanding of soil preparation, fertilization, and pruning practices, with 100% (66/66) indicating that they intend to change or adopt a new practice when growing blueberries. Informal feedback and follow-up conversations revealed that multiple participants had previously been pruning too late, resulting in the removal of flower buds before they form. Pruning, pH requirement, and fertilization were the most common practices mentioned. **Conclusion:** By addressing the need for region-specific blueberry management practices, this program demonstrates how localized Extension education can help bridge the gap between research and growers. Adapting statewide blueberry recommendations for Panhandle conditions allows growers to better implement research-based practices, resulting in healthier plants and improved fruit production.

Boosting Citrus Resilience: The Role Of Silicon In Reducing Temperature Stress Damage

L. Strange, UF/IFAS Extension, Taylor County, Perry, FL, K. Leaks, UF/IFAS NFREC Quincy, FL M. Shahid, UF/IFAS NFREC Quincy, FL, and S. Iqbal, UF/IFAS NFREC Quincy, FL.

Situation: Silicon (Si) is the second most abundant element in the Earth's crust. Although not classified as an essential nutrient for plants, it was recognized as a "plant beneficial substance" by the Association of American Plant Food Control Officials (AAPFCO) in 2012. Freezing stress severely limits citrus production in subtropical regions by disrupting physiological functions and causing irreversible cellular damage. Silicon is widely recognized for its benefits in helping plants cope with various abiotic stresses; however, its specific effects and the mechanisms by which it enhances freezing tolerance in citrus, especially Valencia orange, are still not well understood. **Methods:** Used to evaluate the role of silicon in improving temperature stress tolerance and improving overall health. Two treatments were applied, i.e., 50ppm and 100ppm silicon with control (water only). The application times are biweekly and monthly with foliar spraying. **Results**: Observations showed that silicon application influences several physiological parameters such as leaf greenness, photosynthesis, stomatal conductance, transpiration, and water use efficiency. Silicon can be applied by foliar and root application. It was observed that the hybrid application of Si, both foliar and root, provides maximum beneficial effects. Plants showed better response when treated with 100ppm of Si as foliar and root applications alternatively. These changes can help contribute to improved freezing tolerance for citrus. **Conclusion:** Suggest that silicon fertilization could be an effective strategy to reduce freeze damage and improve the overall health of citrus trees, boosting their resilience from other stressors such as diseases and pest attacks and improving fruit quality; therefore, more research is needed.

Finding Ways to Reduce Substrate Cost Through Using Compost And Substrate Stratification

Qingchun Liu, UF/IFAS Extension Miami-Dade, Department of PROS of Miami-Dade County, Homestead, FL; Shawn Steed, UF/IFAS Extension, Seffner, FL; Jeb Fields, UF/IFAS, Gainesville, FL; and Xingbo Wu, UF/IFAS, Tropical Research and Education Center, Homestead, FL

Situation: The Ornamental industry in Miami-Dade County contributes more than 80% to the values of its overall agricultural sales, ranking first in the state and the nation. However, ornamental growers face many challenges in their production, including continuous substrate consumption, which ranks second among their various production costs. Finding ways to reduce the use of substrate would help reduce their production costs, preserve the natural resources, including peat moss, and eventually increase their profitability. In a study funded by an FDACS AG BMP grant, the effect of adding a local yard-trim-based compost in the substrate and substrate stratification on the growth of Ixora was evaluated. **Methods**: Substrate stratification was achieved by filling half of the 2-gallon pots with landscape pine bark mini nuggets at 30% of pot volume. For half of each type of pot, they were filled with a commercial substrate alone or with the compost at 20% total volume. Ixora liners were planted in early February 2025, and fertilizer was applied as top-dressing at recommended low and high rates. Each treatment had four replicates, and the design was a completely randomized block design. All plants were watered by overhead irrigation. **Results**: Adding the compost showed a beneficial effect on Ixora growth compared to those grown in the substrate alone. Stratification did not significantly affect the plant growth for each substrate. The same effects were seen at each fertilizer rate. **Conclusion**: Both approaches can help reduce the substrate use in the production of Ixora, particularly when they are combined. More research is needed to determine the effects of such treatments on the growth of other major crops in the area.

Sensory Evaluation Of Passion Fruit Helps Growers Make Informed Planting Decisions

Mark Bailey University of Florida, IFAS, Ocala, FL

Situation: Passion fruit (*Passiflora edulis*) contains variation within the species, affecting characteristics such as size, shape, color, aroma, and flavor. A lack of marketing research about which varieties of passion fruit consumers prefer can significantly affect passion fruit growers' economic viability. **Objectives:** Determining which varieties consumers prefer can lead to increased demand for passion fruit and encourage consumer-driven passion fruit production in Florida. **Methods:** To gauge potential consumer interest in passion fruit and compare passion fruit varieties, two sensory evaluations were conducted in Marion County, FL, at the Ocala Downtown Market. In 2023, a purple variety was evaluated, and in 2024, a purple and yellow variety were evaluated. A total of 232 participants completed the anonymous online survey. **Results:** Participants were asked if they had previously consumed fresh passion fruit. Participants responded 62% (n=144) “no” they had not, while 38% (n=88) responded “yes” they had. Participants were then asked if they had consumed *any* kind of passion fruit product. Participants responded 37% (n=86) “no” they had not, while 64% (n=149) responded “yes” they had. A likability rating scale of 1 to 9 was used for the sensory portion of the survey. The evaluation provided participants with fresh-cut samples of a purple (P) and a yellow (Y) variety. Participants provided the following ratings: overall appearance 7.4 (P) and 7.6 (Y), aroma 7.6 (P) and 7.5 (Y), flavor 7.4 (P) and 6.7 (Y), and overall liking 7.7 (P) and 6.8 (Y). When asked if they preferred one over the other, 62% preferred the purple variety while 38% preferred the yellow variety. **Conclusion:** These sensory evaluations provide essential marketing information to current and prospective growers about consumer preferences for two different passion fruit varieties.

Leveraging Social Media Content Creators To Strengthen Local Agriculture

M. Pinkerton, UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County, 250 W County Home Rd, Sanford, FL; H. Eason, UF/IFAS Extension Orange County, 6021 Conway Rd, Orlando, FL; M. Smith, UF/IFAS Extension Lake County, 1951 Woodlea Rd, Tavares, FL; J. Yarborough, UF/IFAS Extension Seminole & Orange Counties, 250 W County Home Rd, Sanford, FL; K. Camm, UF/IFAS Extension Orange County, 6021 Conway Rd, Orlando, FL; S. Michael, UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County, 250 W County Home Rd, Sanford, FL

Situation: Rapid urban development across central Florida has contributed to significant farmland loss, with Seminole County experiencing a 52% reduction in farmland and a 21% decline in the number of farms between 2017 and 2022. A 2024 needs assessment identified increasing agricultural awareness as a top priority for central Florida farms. The objective of this program was to increase public engagement with agriculture by working with social media content creators to expand outreach and strengthen community support. **Methods:** In early 2025, a two-day multicounty farm tour was held across Seminole and Orange Counties, showcasing a variety of agricultural operations including livestock, horticulture, and specialty crops. Selected social media content creators were invited to meet farmers, Extension agents, and agricultural industry professionals to learn firsthand about local production. Through these experiences, content creators developed authentic social media content highlighting farm stories, sustainability practices, and the importance of agriculture in the community. **Results:** Eight months after the farm tour, the creator-generated content has more than 240,000 views and an average engagement rate of approximately 14.5% which is well above industry benchmarks. The event secured over $15,000 in sponsorships and in-kind donations, reflecting strong community investment in the program. Beyond online engagement, outcomes include new partnerships between farmers and local chefs, cross-promotional retail efforts among farms, and content creator recognition and promotion of the resources that UF/IFAS Extension offers the community. Overall, the program created new partnerships and strengthened existing connections between farmers, local chefs, and agricultural organizations. **Conclusion:** This program demonstrates the power of collaboration as well as leveraging social media to increase agricultural literacy and strengthen local food systems. Ongoing evaluation of social media engagement and economic impacts will inform future Extension strategies that support sustainable agriculture amidst ongoing urbanization.

Evaluating Vermicompost Extracts For Root Health In Gardenia Production

C. Sollazzo, UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County, Palmetto, FL.

Situation: Root decline and suspected root rot are recurring issues in container-grown *Gardenia jasminoides* in Florida nurseries. Vermicompost extracts (VCEs; "worm teas") are widely marketed for disease suppression and plant vigor, yet field evidence under commercial conditions is mixed and often confounded by management practices. A local producer planned to implement this practice at scale without comparison data. The Extension agent encouraged a small-scale, side-by-side trial instead—providing a way to assess potential effects and build trust through evidence-based collaboration. This project served as both an applied evaluation for the grower and a professional development opportunity for a new agent integrating on-farm testing into Extension programming. The objectives were to: (1) compare plant health and growth among a standard fungicide program, VCE, and an untreated control; (2) demonstrate a simple on-farm evaluation model for nursery settings; and (3) identify next steps for future trials. **Methods**: Three treatments (fungicide, VCE, and untreated control) were applied to field-grown gardenias under typical production conditions. Plant greenness was rated on a 1–5 scale (1 = healthiest), and canopy area was calculated from height × width. Mean values were analyzed using ANOVA with pairwise t-tests and a Bonferroni-adjusted $\alpha = 0.017$ to control for multiple comparisons. The layout followed existing grower rows and was not randomized, so potential spatial and pest-pressure effects were noted as limitations. **Results**: Fungicide-treated plants showed the highest greenness and canopy area, followed by VCE, then control. All treatments differed significantly in greenness (ANOVA $p < 0.0001$). For canopy area, differences among treatments were modest: fungicide exceeded VCE significantly ($p < 0.017$) and the control marginally ($p < 0.05$), whereas VCE and control showed no significant difference in growth. **Conclusion**: Although VCE did not match the performance of the fungicide program, it trended beneficial compared to no treatment, suggesting possible value in integrated or reduced-input systems. The process highlighted how small-scale trials can engage growers in data-driven decisions and strengthen Extension relationships. This approach will inform future trials under a new FDACS BMP Mini-Grant investigating stratified container media to improve root health and resource efficiency in gardenia production.

Managing Cattle Enterprises Success: Advancing Knowledge And Practice Adoption Among Small-Scale Producers

H. Baker, UF/IFAS Extension, Range Cattle Research and Education Center, Ona, FL; L. Bennett, UF/IFAS Extension, Multi-County, Dade City, FL; B. Stice, UF/IFAS Extension, Polk County, Bartow, FL; A. Williams, UF/IFAS Extension, Hillsborough County, Seffner, FL.

Situation: Small-scale cattle producers often lack access to practical, regionally relevant education that supports efficient herd management and profitability. To address this gap, the Managing Cattle Enterprises for Success (MCES) program was developed to deliver targeted, seasonal seminars across Hillsborough, Polk, and Pasco counties. The primary objective of MCES is to increase participant knowledge of cattle production practices by at least 40% and to motivate at least 65% of attendees to implement new or improved management strategies. **Methods:** MCES uses a rotational seminar format, offering three sessions annually with each county hosting a unique topic in spring, summer, or fall. This structure ensures producers can access all topics regardless of location. Topics are selected collaboratively by Extension agents and specialists and tailored to small-scale operations, covering areas such as seasonal management, mineral nutrition, breeding strategies, and financial planning. The program was carefully organized through virtual planning meetings, task delegation, and coordinated logistics, including advertising, registration, meals, and evaluation. All content was finalized prior to launch to ensure consistency and quality. **Results:** In its first year, MCES demonstrated strong engagement and educational impact. Throughout three seminars, participants showed a 47% increase in knowledge, and 85% indicated intent to implement new or revised practices based on what they learned. These outcomes confirm that the program met and exceeded its stated objectives, fostering both learning and actionable change among attendees. **Conclusion:** MCES offers a replicable and adaptable model for delivering impactful cattle management education to small-scale producers. Its rotational format and focused content promote equitable access and practical application. Early results suggest meaningful improvements in producer knowledge and management intentions, with broader implications for herd productivity, economic sustainability, and regional collaboration. Continued evaluation and refinement will ensure the program remains responsive to local needs and contributes to long-term success in cattle enterprises.

Cooking Through Culture: Engaging Youth In Florida's History And Food Safety through County Line Camp

L.Butler, UF/IFAS Extension, Okeechobee County, Okeechobee, FL., K.Lawson, UF/IFAS Extension, Highlands County, Sebring, FL., J. Keener, UF/IFAS Extension, St. Lucie County, Ft. Pierce, FL.

Situation: Many youth today lack opportunities to connect hands-on learning with the cultural and agricultural heritage that shapes Florida's identity. As food preparation skills and awareness of food origins decline, there is an increasing need for educational programs that blend life skills with historical and cultural context. Extension agents recognized that culinary activities could serve as a tool to teach both food safety and appreciation for Florida's diverse cultural influences. County Line Camp was a multi-county 4-H initiative designed to engage youth in Florida's rich culinary and cultural heritage while teaching food safety practices. Hosted collaboratively by UF/IFAS Extension agents from Highlands, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie Counties, the camp addressed the need for experiential education that connected food preparation with historical context. The objective was to help youth understand how Florida's diverse cultures, such as Spanish, Native American, homesteading, and cowboy traditions, have shaped its food, while teaching them culinary and safety skills. **Methods**: Educational strategies included hands-on cooking lessons, historical reenactments, cultural demonstrations, and STEM-integrated activities such as geomatics mapping. Campers learned knife skills, sanitation using Glo Germ UV light, yeast science, and other pasture-to-plate concepts. Each day focused on a different historical theme while learning cooking skills. Campers utilized the skills learned throughout the week in a final challenge where youth prepared their own meal. **Results:** Outcomes included increased knowledge of food safety, improved culinary confidence, and stronger cultural awareness. Campers demonstrated mastery through practical application, peer collaboration, and trivia-based reflection activities. The program also created inter-county relationships and highlighted the importance of Extension-led youth development. **Conclusion**: County Line Camp's impact lies in its blend of history, food science, and youth engagement. It serves as a replicable model for themed, skill-based youth programming that, in this case, strengthened historical pride and promoted safe food practices.

Cultivating Our Future By Teaching How to Grow Crops in Schools

L., Harlow, UF/IFAS Extension, Bradford County, Starke, FL, and B., Scarbough, UF/IFAS Extension, Bradford County, Starke, FL.

Situation: As a small rural community, Bradford County is host to several secondary schools, the North Florida Technical College, and Santa Fe College secondary campus. Many of these educational programs have school gardens, crop areas, or even greenhouses, but all have expressed a lack of knowledge on maintaining and utilizing these areas for educational purposes. For the last 2 years, I have worked with 3 schools, the technical college, and the Upward Bound program at the Santa Fe campus in Starke, to improve and help educate students in crop production. The objectives of this program were to increase the knowledge and confidence levels of youth participants regarding selection, planting, growing, and harvesting or edible fruits and vegetables. **Methods**: Fall and spring programs have been taught to 3 schools regarding growing edible plants. Veggie transplants and seeds such as tomatoes, peppers, strawberries, potatoes, broccoli, kale, and collards were provided for youth to plant and maintain through the season. Youth were also instructed on setting up and installing micro irrigation systems to maintain the proper watering of these school gardens. **Results**: A total of 19 programs have been delivered between 5 different educational schools between 2024 and 2025. Of the 285 youth that have participated, 93% (267 of 285) increased their knowledge related to crop production. Several youths also stated they increased their confidence and desire to grow crops at their own homes. **Conclusions**: Working with school systems provides an opportunity for youth to gain hands-on experiences and build their confidence levels with growing sustainable foods that they would otherwise not gain without my help.

Planting Extension Pathways: Hands-On Learning For Future DPMs.

M. Greathouse, UF/IFAS Extension, Sumter County, Bushnell, FL, J. E. Davis, UF/IFAS Extension, Sumter County, Bushnell, FL, J. Daugherty, UF/IFAS Extension, Sumter County, Bushnell, FL, and J. S. Strickland, UF/IFAS Extension, Hernando County, Brooksville, FL.

Situation: Florida's Extension services continue to see faculty turnover rates near 10% annually, requiring significant time and resources for recruiting and onboarding. Burnout, stress, and evening/weekend commitments limit retention. Colloquially, it is widely acknowledged that many agents regularly work 50–55 hours per week. This pace is not sustainable long-term and contributes to high turnover, especially among Early Career Agents. Although it is said it takes about three years to fully understand the role of an Extension Agent, many feel it should not take that long. Part of this challenge is the low visibility and outside understanding of Extension and its mission. **Methods:** To provide an authentic look into the work of an Extension Agent, and to proactively expose well-educated young professionals to this career pathway, UF/IFAS Extension Sumter County partnered with the UF/IFAS Doctor of Plant Medicine (DPM) program. Hands-on learning and internship experience are foundational within the DPM curriculum, and many students naturally gravitate toward Extension-related experiences. In the latest installment of this long-standing (10+ years) partnership, nine students enrolled in the Integrated Plant Medicine Fall 2025 course visited UF/IFAS Extension Sumter County, listened to four faculty presentations, and toured a local commercial facility. **Results:** This experience provided students with a clear and accurate perspective of Extension in practice. Students gained understanding of common real-world challenges in Extension, including labor management, fire-related damage, quality control, sanitation, pest management, and water-related issues. 100% of participants reported increased understanding of how Extension functions as a cooperative organization that supports both education and the broader agricultural community, and many expressed interest in pursuing Extension as a career. Hearing from faculty at different career points- an early career, mid-career, and two late-career Extension Agents- provided insight into the range of possibilities across an Extension career trajectory. As a result of this program, two individuals have furthered their contact with UF/IFAS Extension, pursuing shadowing opportunities. **Conclusion:** This program is an effective way to increase visibility of Extension as a career option among graduate students, while simultaneously serving as a strategy for current agents to scout emerging talent for future faculty roles.

Access, Need, And Place: Evaluating Community Priorities In An Urbanizing Nassau County

S. Samiei, UF/IFAS Extension Nassau County, Yulee, FL

Situation: Nassau County is experiencing rapid urbanization in the east, while the west remains deeply agricultural. This unique mix presents a challenge for UF/IFAS Extension: how can programs remain relevant and available across two very different community types? Traditional needs assessments identify community interests, but they do not evaluate Extension programs' ease of use to meet those needs. **Objective:** The objective is to develop and pilot a place-based needs assessment model that identifies priority Extension programs and geographic gaps across urban and rural communities in Nassau County. **Methods:** This project will implement a strategic evaluation framework that reimagines needs assessment by focusing on availability, need, and place. A 2×2 matrix (High/Low availability × High/Low Need) will categorize program priorities, and a third dimension — urban versus rural "place" — will highlight how geography and community context influence participation. Data will be collected through stakeholder surveys administered with Survey123 and ESRI GIS, listening sessions, and Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) focus groups. **Expected Outcomes:** Data gathered will be mapped spatially to visualize differences in needs and availability across the county. This analysis will guide program prioritization, improve outreach strategies, and ensure geographic distribution of Extension programs. Findings will identify programs positioned in the "ideal zone" (high need and high availability) as well as areas where program availability may need to be strengthened. **Conclusion:** By applying this framework, Nassau County Extension aims to transition its needs assessment process from a simple information-gathering exercise to a place-based decision-support tool. This approach will support strategic program planning and resource allocation of extension programs across a rapidly evolving county landscape.

Meeting Community Needs With The Expanding Agriculture: Workforce Seminar.

Marnie Ward, Toni Noaker, and Alyssa Schortinghouse. UF/IFAS Extension, Citrus County, Lecanto, FL.

Situation: Nationwide agricultural productivity continues to rise, with over $500 billion in value reported in the recent Census of Agriculture. As populations grow and communities expand, the future of agricultural careers will also evolve; for economists and business developers working behind a computer or databank, the geneticists and microbiologists in laboratories and research institutions, and the hands-on ranch managers and agronomists working in the fields, and even careers that have yet to be created. The Expanding Agriculture: Workforce Seminar was developed with input from local farmers, ranchers, and producers. The program was a collaboration with the Citrus County School administrators, Hernando-Citrus Farm Bureau, Farm Credit of Central Florida, industry professionals, and University of Florida and Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences faculty, researchers, and specialists. **Methods:** A one-day hands-on career seminar was held at the College of Central Florida. One hundred ten students and fifteen teachers, and school administrators participated in fifteen concurrent sessions. The sessions included drone demonstrations, safety tests, plant breeding, irrigation technology, pathways to agricultural careers, aquaculture, agricultural law, and equine therapy. Students also participated in round-table discussions with agricultural professionals. **Results**: Students completed a post-event survey (70/110; 64% completion) to gather their feedback on the program. Sixty-eight percent of students said they were introduced to a career they had not considered, and twenty-five percent of those students indicated they would explore a career in agriculture. Sixty-four volunteers donated 208 hours, valued at $6,240.00. **Conclusion**: This program addressed a need in the community for skilled agricultural workers and provided a structure for addressing those needs with educational, hands-on programming.