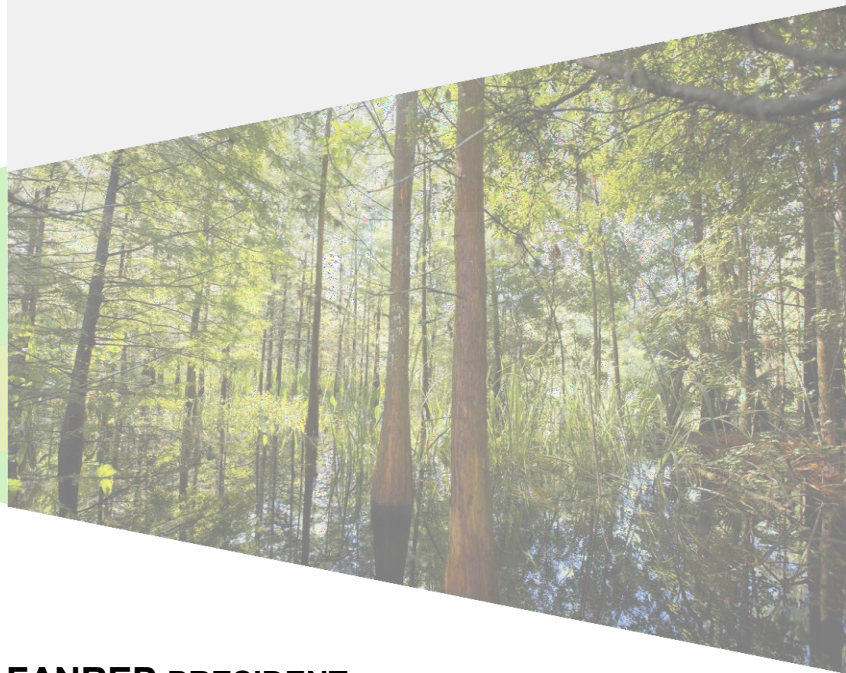




Alyssa Vinson



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MESSAGE FROM THE FANREP PRESIDENT

In times of contemplation or tumult, I often turn to the stargazers, artists, and writers to help provide a framework for my thoughts. As a scientist and lover of all things tree, I am often drawn to the works of individuals like Wendell Berry or Mary Oliver, but in this moment when tasked with writing my 'President's message' I was reminded of Jane Hirshfield, who wrote:

*More and more I have come to admire resilience.
Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam
returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous
tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side,
it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true.
But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,
mitochondria, figs – all this resinous, unretractable earth.*

Over the coming year, many of us will be navigating shifts in reporting structures, organizational priorities, and evolving expectations across UF/IFAS Extension and our county partners. Change can bring uncertainty, but it also presents opportunities to strengthen relationships, clarify our value, and reimagine how we work together to serve Florida's communities. Natural resource issues rarely fit neatly within a single discipline. Whether we are addressing urban forestry, water resources, wildlife conservation, coastal resilience, invasive species, or environmental education, our successes depend on partnerships. The challenges facing our state are complex, and they require us to draw upon the expertise, creativity, and perspectives of colleagues across program areas, departments, counties, and agencies.



Alyssa Vinson



MESSAGE FROM THE FANREP PRESIDENT

Continued

During times of transition, it is especially important that we continue to support one another professionally and personally. FANREP has always been more than a professional association. It is a network of colleagues who share ideas, mentor emerging professionals, celebrate successes, and help one another navigate challenges. FANREP will be carefully considering how best to provide support for each other as an organization over this next year.

As natural resource professionals, we often ask communities to think long term, invest in resilience, and work collectively toward shared goals. We should apply those same principles to ourselves and our profession. By remaining flexible, collaborative, and focused on our shared mission, we can continue to advance natural resource education and stewardship throughout Florida, regardless of the changes occurring around us.

Thank you for the work you do each day and for the many ways you contribute to FANREP. I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish together in the months ahead.

Alyssa Vinson

President, Florida Association of Natural Resource Extension Professionals (FANREP)

Program Announcements

The Great Southeast Pollinator Census is Here!

By Jeromy Rhoden, Urban & Residential Horticulture Agent, Marion County



It's August, which means it's time for the Great Southeast Pollinator Census (GSEPC)!

It's August, which means it's time for the [Great Southeast Pollinator Census \(GSEPC\)](#)! 2026 marks Florida's third year participating in this fun, community-science-led conservation initiative. Founded by the University of Georgia in 2019, the census is now a six-state initiative that includes Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Each year, on two days in August, we invite residents across the Southeast to conduct 15-minute insect observations using the official [counting sheets and insect identification guides](#). After observations are complete, participants can upload their counts to the [GSEPC database](#).

The pollinator census was created to meet three overall objectives: increase sustainable pollinator habitat; educate the public about the importance and value of insects by increasing entomological literacy; and provide useful data for research through community science.

During the last two years, Florida residents have contributed greatly to these objectives. In 2024, more than 2,800 counts were submitted, with participation from 53 counties. One year later, Florida nearly doubled its total, with more than 5,100 counts submitted and 59 counties participating. Since joining the census, Florida residents have reported planting 293 new sustainable pollinator habitats statewide as a result of learning about the census.

So, how does Florida compare with the rest of the Southeast? For the past two years, Florida has ranked second in the number of counts submitted. Collectively, participating states submitted more than 27,000 counts in 2025. Since the census began in 2019, participants across the Southeast have planted 4,505 sustainable pollinator habitats.

The Great Southeast Pollinator Census is Here!

(Continuation)



Participating is easy: simply place a chair in front of your favorite blooming plant, set a 15-minute timer, and record the number and type of insects you see land on that plant. When time is up, scan the QR code on the counting sheet and upload your observations to the portal. It's that simple!

Many GSEPC public counting and educational events are taking place across Florida this month. Visit the [UF/IFAS Great Florida Pollinator Census Blog](#) to look for events in your county or to add your event to the list. The 2026 GSEPC will take place on Friday, August 21, and Saturday, August 22. Counts may be conducted at any time during these two days, and there is no limit to the number of observations you can complete—just use one plant per observation. Get a head start by practicing insect-group identification with the [resources on the GSEPC website](#).

Finally, if you have not already done so, [like and follow the UF/IFAS Great Florida Pollinator Census Facebook page](#) for pollinator-conservation information and event updates throughout the year.

For more information about the Great Southeast Pollinator Census, contact Jeremy Rhoden at jeremy.k.rhoden@ufl.edu.



Get Involved

Scan the QR code or visit

www.gsepc.org

To learn more and download
count sheets and resources

Travel Grant Success Story 1

By Carolyn Kovacs, Sea Grant Agent
Volusia/Flagler Counties



The biannual ANREP conference took place in Wilmington, North Carolina from May 12-15 and as usual, FANREP was well represented. FANREP members were responsible for sixteen oral and poster presentations at the conference, with topics including green stormwater infrastructure, citizen science seagrass monitoring programs, landscaping irrigation programs, the Pollinator Ambassador Academy, and a Master Gardener podcast.



In addition to learning about the programs developed by our colleagues across the state, we also had a chance to learn from natural resources agents from across the country. ANREP spans agents from Sea Grant to forestry to horticulture, so the topics covered all sorts of topics. A couple of my favorite presentations included "Heated Topics, Warm Approaches," which was about science communication with tough conversations, one on yaupon tea, and a workshop on media tools.



We also got to explore the natural resources of Wilmington during our field trip afternoon. While some of my colleagues headed out to kayaking on a lake or hiking to see and learn about Venus fly traps (did you know they only grow within a 60-mile radius area around Wilmington!?), I headed out to the Cape Fear Utilities to learn about their state-of-the-art water treatment facility. As a result of high levels of PFAS detected in the Cape Fear River detected last decade, the utilities system added additional steps to their system that uses granular activated carbon to remove PFAS from their drinking water. It was a very cool experience to get a behind the scenes tour and learn about the water we were drinking, and it inspired me to look into the drinking water in my home counties more.



We also got to enjoy walking the beautiful riverfront along downtown Wilmington after sessions and of course celebrating our many 2026 ANREP award winners. The next ANREP conference will take place in Deluth, Minnesota from May 30-June 1, 2028 so go ahead and mark your calendars now and hope everyone can attend!

See photos attached - agent Megan Moore accepting her ANREP award, the wastewater treatment plant, and a beautiful view of Wilmington, NC

Carolyn Kovacs is the Florida Sea Grant Agent with UF/IFAS Extension in Volusia and Flagler Counties.

Travel Grant Success Story 2

By Randall Penn, Waste Reduction Agent
Sarasota County

From the ballpark to our backyard: UF/IFAS brings campus innovation to the Green Sports Alliance Summit

How do we turn a day at the ballpark into a win for waste reduction? UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County helped answer that question by hosting a university poster session at the Green Sports Alliance Summit in Cleveland Ohio. Set against the backdrop of a Progressive Field, home to MLB's Cleveland Guardians, the posters showcased how universities are transforming operations, engaging communities, and advancing research that translate to venues and events of every size.

The poster session brought together professors, students, and sustainability directors from 13 universities across the country to share projects, educational programs, and research. The diversity of work on display was energizing. Student-led initiatives that reimagine fan engagement opportunities, compostable materials and food waste diversion, and research on how climate changes are impacts sports were front and center at the event. The result was a picture of "Resilient" practices, the theme of the Green Sports Summit.

UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County is committed to translating these lessons into local action. We're growing education that helps organizations improve environmental practices, schools with recycling projects, and connecting students with industry leaders to assist with developing sustainability programs. The momentum we saw in Cleveland is already informing our workshops and technical assistance here on the Suncoast.



Professor Randall Penn, event host shows off UF's green sports education programs.



Students from Auburn, Columbia, and Washington University were just a few of the institutions represented at Progressive Field during opening night at the Green Sports Alliance Summit.



Travel Grant Success Story 3

By Carrie Stevenson, Coastal Sustainability Agent
Escambia County

Thanks in part to a FANREP travel scholarship, I was able to attend this year's ANREP conference in coastal North Carolina. Among the highlights of ANREP meetings are the field tours built into the conference. I joined a group visiting a large parcel of longleaf pine, and we were treated to multiple sightings of red-cockaded woodpeckers. These are a threatened species, but quite active in this forest.

My biggest draw to participating in this trip was the promise of seeing carnivorous species. We are lucky to have several healthy stands of pitcher plants, sundews, and butterworts in northwest Florida. But we don't have Venus flytraps (*Dionaea muscipula*)! Instead of tubular pitchers or sticky leaf traps, the Venus flytrap has a hair-trigger mechanism that encloses insects into its paired leaves and sealed within its "teeth." We usually consider plants immobile, so the idea of a plant that can "bite" really disrupts our understanding of the world. Those intimidating spikes at the margin of the leaves are more like sensitive tendrils. Attracted to the reddish insides of the leaf, insects crawl along the edge, touching bristles and setting off a mechanism that creates rare movement in a plant. The technical term for one of those spiky tendrils is a "trichome." When two or more trichomes are triggered in quick succession by movement, a metabolic process called thigmonasty begins. The movement of nutrients and water within the plant cause changes in osmotic pressure, resulting in reduced rigidity of the plant's cell walls and the leaves closing. A similar phenomenon known as thigmotropy explains how vines curl towards a stimulus and wind around them. "Thigma" is Greek for "touch," "tropy" means "response or turning," while "nast" refers to non-directional movement.



Travel Grant Success Story 3

By Carrie Stevenson, Coastal Sustainability Agent
Escambia County



Venus flytraps grow in the same type of habitat as pitcher plants—soggy bogs with mucky, nutrient-poor soil. They can handle a little more shade and cold than pitcher plants and grow along the edges of forested wetlands called pocosins. They're native only to the wetlands of coastal North and South Carolina, and only one species of its type exists. The vast majority (75%!) of the wild plants are located within a Nature Conservancy tract, North Carolina game lands (where I saw them), and on buffer property around Camp LeJeune. While the plants are quite small and the modified “flytrap” leaves grow close to the ground, we identified them easily by the white blooms growing upright about a foot off the ground. This physical distance helps prevent predation of the same insect's plants rely upon to pollinate them.

Venus flytraps are grown commercially and are available for sale at some nurseries, but they require particular care. Only use rainwater or distilled water to water them, and refrain from deliberately triggering the closing mechanism of the leaves. It takes a significant amount of energy for the plants to close, and overdoing it could stress and kill the plants. If you have a chance to see the plants in the wild, step carefully—they are threatened by habitat loss and wild poaching.

Travel Grant Success Story 4

By Tia Saracino, Horticulture Agent/MGV Coordinator
Hillsborough County

From Coneflowers to Chile Peppers: A NACAA Journey Through Colorado

I recently attended the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) Conference in Denver, Colorado, where Extension professionals from across the country gathered to share innovative programming, research, and outreach strategies. During the conference, I presented two posters and delivered an oral presentation titled “Extension Education on Attracting Wildlife Creates Eco-Friendly Landscapes.” My presentation sparked engaging discussions with attendees who shared similar concerns about the prevalence of “sterile” landscapes in their regions. Together, we explored strategies for incorporating resilient flowers, shrubs, and trees that can thrive in developed environments while providing valuable habitat for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. These conversations reinforced the importance of Extension education in promoting more sustainable and biodiverse landscapes.

One highlight of the conference was visiting the Denver Urban Community Garden, where vibrant purple coneflowers and other pollinator-friendly plants were in full bloom. I also toured Colorado State University’s new Spur Campus, an innovative facility showcasing advancements in plant science, agriculture, water resources, and technology through interactive exhibits and educational programs. The conference concluded with a tour of southern Colorado’s fresh produce industry. We visited three farms and learned about aquaponic lettuce production, melon cultivation, and the region’s famous Pueblo chile peppers. The tour provided valuable insights into the diversity and innovation of Colorado agriculture. Attending NACAA allowed me to share Florida Extension programming, learn from colleagues across the nation, and bring back new ideas to support residential horticulture education and sustainable landscapes in Hillsborough County.



Purple coneflowers in bloom at Denver Urban Garden.



Cynthia and Tia presenting a poster on the Great Florida Pollinator Census.



Fresh picked watermelons at Musso Farm stand in Pueblo, CO.



Lisa and Tia presenting a poster on MGVs adopting sustainable landscaping practices.

Credits:

All photos can be credited to
Photo: Tia Saracino, UF/IFAS

New FFL Plants & Pollinator App



FFL Agents and Educators ON August 18 & 19 the new FFL Plants & Pollinators App will be deployed and available to existing FFL Plant Guide app users and available for download on Apple and Google Play stores.

The newly developed app combines the former FFL Plant Guide, Bee Gardens, and Butterfly Gardens apps. Users can search for the right plants for their site, build custom plant lists, explore pollinator-friendly options, learn about invasive plant species, and access expanded plant information all from a single app.



Congratulations!

Promotion, Tenure & Permanent Status Milestones

Congratulations to the following FANREP members who achieved career milestones this year! The following members were awarded Permanent Status, Promotion, or both.

CATEGORY	FANREP MEMBER	2026 UF/IFAS ACHIEVEMENT
 ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR + TENURE	Lakesh Sharma	★ Promoted to Associate Professor with Tenure
 PROMOTION + PERMANENT STATUS	Emily Marois	★ Extension Agent II + Permanent Status
 PROMOTION + PERMANENT STATUS	Vincent Encomio	★ Extension Agent III + Permanent Status
 PROMOTION + PERMANENT STATUS	Tiare Saracino	★ Extension Agent III + Permanent Status
 PERMANENT STATUS	Lorna Bravo	★ Awarded Permanent Status
 EXTENSION AGENT PROMOTION	Marnie Ward	★ Promoted to Extension Agent III
 EXTENSION AGENT PROMOTION	Savanna Barry	★ Promoted to Extension Agent IV



The direct UF/IFAS page for the 2026 Promotion, Tenure, and Permanent Status announcement is:

[UF/IFAS 2026 Faculty Promotion Tenure and Permanent Status Announcement](#)

Thank you ♥

Thank you for your dedication, leadership, and commitment to advancing UF/IFAS and our communities!



Are you interested in contributing
 by sharing your program stories
 to our **FANREP Newsletter?**



Share Your Impact

Highlight the great work
 happening in your program
 and community.



Inspire & Connect

Your stories help others
 learn, collaborate,
 and grow.



Strengthen Extension

Showcase innovative
 solutions and
 best practices.



Together We Grow

Let's celebrate our
 successes and the
 people behind them.



Contact our Newsletter & Communication Team



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