

## FACAA Report for 2019 NACAA AM/PIC Scholarship Funded Travel

Ray Bodrey, UF/IFAS Extension Gulf County

Recently, I attended and presented at the 104<sup>th</sup> NACAA AM/PIC in Fort Wayne, Indiana, thanks in large part to a FACAA travel scholarship. This was my 3<sup>rd</sup> AM/PIC and one of the most memorable professional development experiences that I've ever had.

As always regarding this conference, the networking opportunity with extension professionals is simply immeasurable. Although the exchanging of ideas and learning from one another is a key take away of the conference, the most impactful professional development value for me this year probably came from the pre-tour & end of conference tour. The natural resource pre-tour was centered around wetland preservation. It was very informative to visit sites around northern Indiana, where bottomland had been carved by glacial drift. These areas are filled with wildlife and native plants, with very different milkweed than we have in Florida! We toured a biodiversity rich wetland on the continental divide as well as a pristine loblolly marsh preserve. It was interesting to hear from professionals about the threat of development and other issues these areas face and how educational outreach has played a major role in conservation.

Touring northern Indiana on the final day was also of great value, as well. Our group toured a 100% organic certified alfalfa operation. The rancher shared the process, complete with trials & tribulations of converting a traditional ranch into organic pastureland and how this crop is now trending. On this tour, we also visited two vineyards, a winery and a distillery. These venues have brought a boost to the local economy, as ag tourism is quickly becoming a big hit in the state.

The skills, ideas and networking connections gained from this national conference was a tremendous opportunity. I was fortunate and honored to have receive a FACAA travel scholarship for this important professional development event.