

Dauphin Farms, Inc., *Bay County*

Submitted by Extension Agent(s): Marjorie Moore, Ph.D.

Mildon and Sue Dauphin come from farm backgrounds with Mildon's family having farmed since the 1800s. Because farming was "in his blood" they started Dauphin Farm in 1968 while continuing with their outside occupations. Before many of the current management practices became standard, the Dauphin family was already implementing them. These practices are demonstrated for groups and individuals touring their farm. Initially, they grew watermelons on the newly cleared land for the local market featuring red, orange and yellow flesh melons. In the early '70s, there was an interest in selling grass fed beef. This led to a "traditional" beef cattle farm specializing in marketing to local individuals, where the consumer could select the animal to be processed. In 1983, the family realized blueberries were a better crop for their acidic soil and began a U-pick farm. This crop had a niche in the local market which still operates today because of the high market demand for early-season fruit. After researching blueberry varieties and associated maintenance requirements, such as pest and disease



management, cold hardiness of early cultivars; results of their own variety tests and reviewing University of Florida and University of Georgia Extension recommendations, they decided on growing rabbiteye blueberries. These berries were developed from the local wild blueberry variety that grows well in local conditions of moderate to high temperatures and acidic soil. The Dauphin family continues to test new blueberry cultivars. Pesticides have never been used on their blueberry plants. They have a steady clientele that have picked their own berries for over 25 years reducing their need to market. As an added service to their clients, they provide plants to those interested in growing their own blueberries. They have shared their irrigation and other best management practices with clientele demonstrating the value of the researched based information. When they started blueberries, low pressure irrigation was in its infancy so they tested many techniques. They have continued to advance irrigation technology for water savings, erosion control and disease reduction. Many of these methods are considered basic best management practices today, but the Dauphin family were innovators in our community by employing these methods years earlier.

The Dauphins also found another niche as a supplier of cold hardy palms to both commercial and residential markets for 20 years. They have grown a variety of palms in containers and in the fields. Currently, they grow European (Mediterranean) Fan, Pindo, Windmill, Canary Island, and Washingtonia palms. They changed to all field grown palms to increase profitability, reduce labor and better demonstrate to clients how palms would grow in the home environment.

Realizing many families that visited their U-pick operations knew little about gardening, the Dauphins started a vegetable garden. This resulted in the families



having a whole farm experience. The garden is used to educate them about the importance of agriculture. Many youth groups visit the farm, pick berries and learn about local agriculture. The farm also has chickens to support local school enrichment 4-H Embryology Projects.

Improving Agriculture through Extension Involvement

The Dauphins have worked with the Bay County Extension Service continuously to provide quality programs educating the public about agriculture and production practices. They are the ideal Extension volunteers supporting Horticulture, Family and Consumer Sciences and 4-H Programs in our community. The Dauphins assisted and have provided equipment, materials and supplies, door prizes, and blueberries for food preservation and herb programs; taught blueberry and palm classes; shared their personal expertise through Extension workshops, programs and tours for youth groups, master gardeners and other individuals who are interested in growing blueberries and palms. They have given many individual consultations to people visiting their farm on an as-needed basis and refer them to UF/IFAS & UGA Extension resources. They currently serve on local Extension advisory committees and are advocates for our local and statewide Extension programs. The Dauphins sponsor many youth organizations including local FFA Chapters and 4-H Clubs. They have provided free blueberry plants for 4-H school gardens, assisted with registration and scoring during Tropicana Public Speaking Contest and organized Embryology and Ag Literacy programs involving Farm Bureau and Master Gardeners. The Dauphins have encouraged Farm Bureau, Beekeepers and other agriculture organizations to partner with Extension for programs serving both youth and adult clientele.

Impacting Agriculture in Northwest Florida

The Dauphins have had and continue to have a great impact on agriculture production and literacy for youth. They have been instrumental in building partnerships and collaborations for local Agriculture entities and Extension. These projects include AG Literacy, Ag-in-the-Classroom programs, embryology, local school gardens, coloring contests, and speech contests.

Mildon has served on the Board of Directors of the Bay County Farm Bureau since 1993 and as president for six years. He has been a member of the UF/IFAS Bay County Extension Overall Advisory Committee since 2009.

Both Mildon and Sue serve as resource leaders for the 4-H embryology projects. Sue coordinates the 4-H embryology and Ag Literacy programs, currently serves as the Vice-Chair of Bay County Farm Bureau, chairs the Bay County Farm Bureau Women's Committee (2010–present) and is the District 1 (Northwest Florida from the Apalachicola River west to the state line) representative on the State Farm Bureau Women's Leadership committee from 2011–present.

They are our local go to experts on blueberry and palm production as well as leaders in the support of youth agriculture education. Dauphin Farms brings people of all ages and backgrounds out of their comfort zone into the agriculture landscape of our community. Their efforts and enthusiasm have excited youth and families about agriculture and about being stewards of the environment. ■



Mildon and Sue Dauphin
Panama City, FL

