

# EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

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## SOUTH FLORIDA PRODUCTION



The FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program Class 6 toured South Florida farms and packinghouses in January. From visiting an FFVA member's popular retail outlet to watching sugar cane burn, it was an exciting learning experience.



## Diversity of Florida agriculture impresses Class 6



By  
**Zach Sweat**  
TriEst Ag  
Group Inc.

In mid-January, ELDP Class 6 saw firsthand the diversity of the Florida fruit and vegetable industry on the annual industry tour, this year focusing on South Florida winter and spring crop production.

On the second day, we visited with Paul Orsenigo of Grower's Management at his Belle Glade operation as he showcased his fields of baby spinach and arugula.

Orsenigo explained the growing and packing process of this quick, high-value and high-input crop, which is much different than multi-

month crops such as tomatoes, peppers and berries that many class members are more familiar with. In just 24 days, this crop goes from direct seeding of about 3 to 4 million seeds per acre to mechanical harvesting and field packing. Because of the fast growing cycle and the uncertainty of market demands, Orsenigo told the class that the salad crops are the only crops grown with a contract – all other crop production by GMI is sold on the open market. More times than not, a single harvest is done before the process is started over again.

Orsenigo asked the class how to connect with younger generations from a marketing and production standpoint. Class members agreed that their age group is looking for

continued advancements in consumer-friendly, value-added packaging that appeals to those looking for healthy, easy meal components with less waste.

Before parting ways, Orsenigo offered a few words to the class.

"You guys are the future. My hope is some of you will continue to be involved."

Grower's Management is a partnership between Orsenigo and David Basore that started with 80 acres in 1985 and has expanded to seven locations from Loxahatchee to Clewiston, with a variety of crops produced. In addition to his duties at GMI, Orsenigo serves as chairman of the Board of Directors for FFVA and was instrumental in the creation of the ELDP.

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**SUSTAINING SPONSOR**

# Class feels the burn during stop at U.S. Sugar



By **Kyle Hill**  
Southern Hill Farms

**O**f the 420,000 acres of sugar cane in the state of Florida, U.S. Sugar has 200,000 in production. There are many costs that go into maintaining that much land. Efficiency is crucial. All of the tractors have GPS-guided systems, which prevents all aspects of human error with tractor drivers. The production process is 100 percent mechanized.

After the cane is harvested, it is loaded onto rail cars that take it to the sugar mill. U.S. Sugar is the only sugar farming operation that uses its own rail system to transport its product. It is the longest short-line railroad in the United States. Each rail car can hold 40 tons of cane, and 1,000 rail cars are used each day. Each rail car has its own unique RFID tag, which allows the mill personnel to know which variety is being brought in. It also allows for traceability. If something is wrong with a load, they can check the RFID on the car and know which field the cane came from.

Before harvesting a block, the field is set on fire to clean out many of the leaves attached to the cane. A permit is required from the forestry division for each burn. The permit must be used on the same day that it is given. This can cause problems because a lot of smoke is created during the burning process. With



**Class 6 watches a sugar cane burn. Farmers set fields on fire to clear out many of the plants' leafy sections for harvesting. Rules are very strict regarding when and how a burn takes place.**

populated areas nearby, the wind must be blowing in the opposite direction for the farm to be granted the permit.

Our guide, Les Baucum, showed us firsthand how the burning process took place. It was quite the spectacle to witness an entire field burn in just

a few minutes. This was the first time I had ever been to a sugar cane farm, and Baucum provided us with much information on the production process. From the burning of the fields to the transport to the mills, our time spent with Baucum was informative and enlightening.





# Let the facts speak



By **Travis Kuhn**  
**Spring Valley Farms**

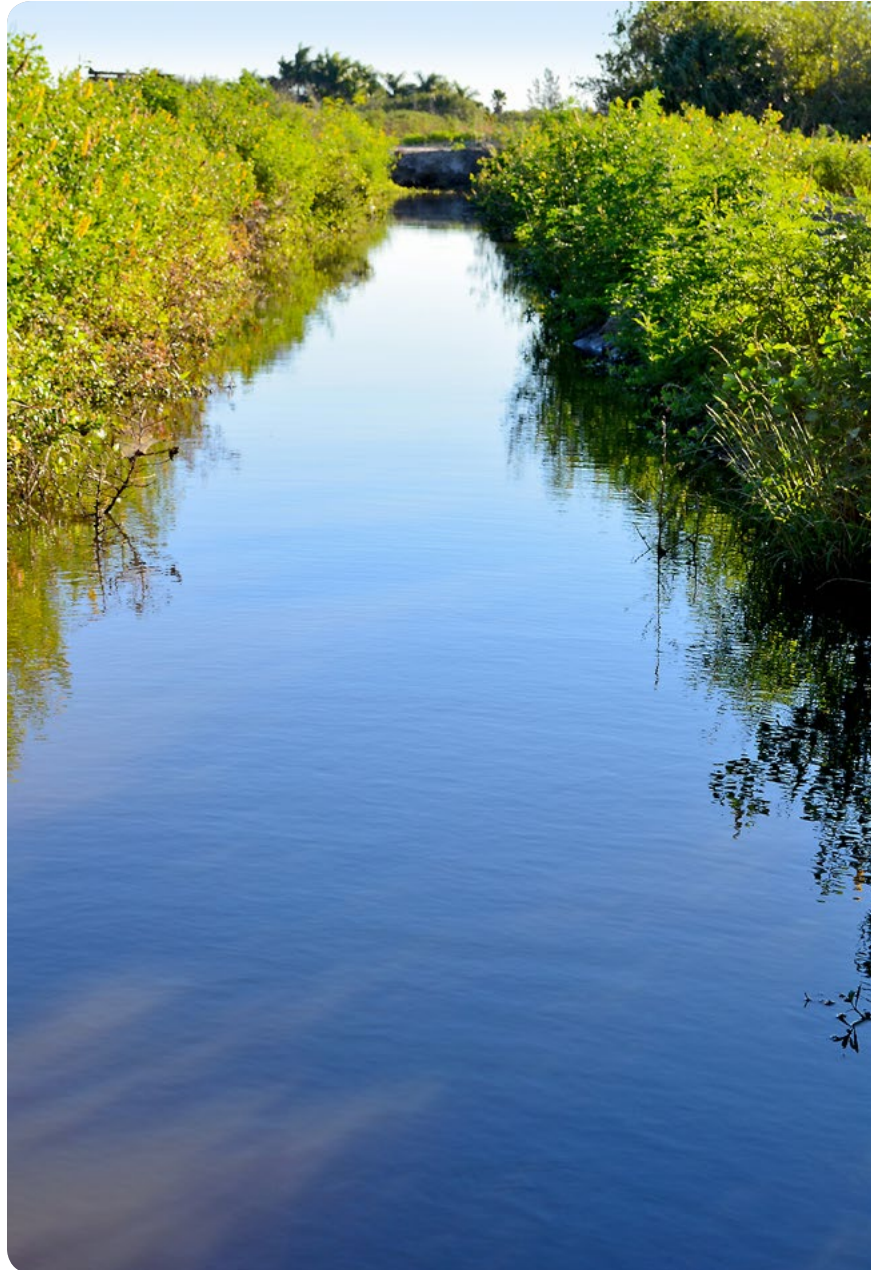
Often it seems the general public is swayed by the vocal few who scream the loudest. Producers in the Everglades Agricultural Area are living out that experience, fighting a public perception battle big enough to grab state and national headlines.

During our visit and tour of the sugar mill at the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida, Jim Shine, senior vice president of agriculture, reviewed with us the history of water use in the EAA. He also discussed factors affecting South Florida water quality and the algal blooms for which the producers, particularly in sugar cane, have been unfairly blamed.

According to his presentation, here are some key facts to best counter misinformation:

- Since the passage of the Everglades Forever Act in 1994, area farmers have contributed more than \$200 million toward water treatment and recovery programs and infrastructure.
- More than 90 percent of the Everglades Protection Area has achieved the 10 ppb phosphorus levels mandated by the Everglades Forever. EAA producers have reduced phosphorus runoff by an annual average of 55 percent.
- Since 2003, an average of 97 percent of inflow to Lake Okeechobee has come from the 5,000 square-mile water basin north of the lake. Only 3 percent comes from the south.
- On average, only one half of 1 percent of the water that moves through the St. Lucie Estuary originated from sources south of Lake Okeechobee.
- More than 70 percent of the flow through the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries comes from their respective watersheds.
- 92 percent of the phosphorus flowing into the St. Lucie Estuary originates in the local watershed.

Armed with this information, all of us should be prepared to defend the EAA's contributions to South Florida.



# TKM Bengard a giant in head lettuce production



By **John McIntyre**  
H. M. Clause, Inc.

**E**LDP Class 2 alum Nick Basore was our guide for our tour of Belle Glade-based TKM Bengard's fields and packing facility. Basore, who handles financial analysis, said the company is the largest lettuce grower in the United States east of the Mississippi River. We learned that head lettuces such as iceberg are more like commodity crops rather than row crops, and

that TKM Bengard specializes in growing leaf lettuces on the muck soils. The majority of the lettuces TKM grows are sold in 800-pound bins and are destined for the processing market to be turned in to bagged salads.

Lettuce is harvested by hand and loaded onto a truck destined for the packinghouse. Once there, it is sent through a vacuum cooler to remove the field heat and bring it down to the proper storage temperature. Depending on the ambient air temperature and the time of year, this can take anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. Most of the lettuce TKM grows is typically



moved into and then shipped out of the cooler within 12 hours of harvest.

Basore also discussed the importance of food safety. He mentioned that they are constantly being audited and that food safety is something that they take very seriously. While driving through the fields, we noticed that a short mesh fence – called a “frog fence” – had been placed around all of the lettuce fields. The fences help ensure frogs and other critters are kept out of the lettuce crop.

TKM stands for Toby, Kevin, and Michael, who along with three other Basore brothers are all involved in the business today. TKM Bengard is in a partnership with Salinas, CA-based Bengard Ranches. The partnership originated many years ago when folks from the two companies sat down at the Elks Club in Belle Glade one day and drew up a deal on a napkin, Basore told us. I thought this was especially interesting because it's a classic example of how business deals used to be conducted, especially in Belle Glade.



Michael Johnson (left) shows Class 6 around the TKM Bengard packing facility.





## Duda combines tech, time-honored practices

**J**oby Sherrod (Class 2), senior manager of agronomic services, and Rob Atchley (Class 1), general manager of citrus groves for A. Duda & Sons, met Class 6 for an excellent lunch and tour of the company's LaBelle citrus operation.



By **Simon Bollin**  
Hillsborough County  
Economic  
Development  
Council

A. Duda & Sons is a diversified farming operation encompassing properties across Florida, Texas and California. The company produces everything from citrus, celery, sod, sweet corn, radishes and timber to raising cattle. The LaBelle farm was purchased in 1962 and sits on 25,000 acres: 11,000 acres of citrus, 500 acres of sod, and 1,600 acres of sugar cane. The balance is devoted to cattle production, leased to other growers or used for hunting leases.

Citrus blocks are seepage irrigated and the entire property has been laid out naturally and by design to only need five drainage pumps to adjust water levels on the farm. New high-density plantings are laid out and planted via GPS, saving time and labor. Technology at A. Duda & Sons carries over into fertilizer application as well with GPS-guided seeing-eye spreaders that stop fertilizer flow where a tree has been removed due to disease. This, along with extensive soil sampling and a blend of soluble and controlled release fertilizer, makes sure the trees get the proper nutrients while reducing fertilizer usage and runoff/leaching.

Managers and staff at A. Duda & Sons are consummate land managers striving to produce multiple crops efficiently with time-honored traditions and new technologies.

## R.C. Hatton provides custom-packaged beans and corn

**A**ctivities on Day 1 included a stop at the R.C. Hatton packinghouse to learn about the bean and corn packaging process. We were led on our tour by ELDP Class 2 alum Jonathan Allen.



By **Jeff Searcy**  
Helena  
Chemical Co.

Founded in 1932, R.C. Hatton has grown from a small bean and corn grower into a company with thousands of acres of beans, corn, sugar cane and cabbage. R.C. Hatton has a strong partnership with Hugh Branch to market their vegetables. They grow in South Florida as well as in Georgia to supply their customers year-round.

After getting a brief background on R.C. Hatton, we headed to the bean grading line that's used to ensure high quality standards are met for their produce. With the majority of the beans being machine-picked, the grading line is essential to remove any unwanted plant material or beans that don't meet specifications. Once through the line, most of the beans either go into ready-to-cook bags found in your local grocery store or into bulk packaging for the food service industry and schools. Beans that don't meet the quality specifications are sent out as cow feed, so nothing goes to waste.

The corn cooler, which includes both conventionally grown and organic corn, introduced us to the many different pack sizes and presentations customers require. Whether the buyer demands a specific number of ears per tray, husk or no husk, R.C. Hatton's line is able to meet the demand. With the help of manual and automated grading, they have perfected the process of supplying customized packaged produce to their buyers.





# RCMA center prepares children for school



By **Jordan Yancy Driscolls**

**O**ur ELDP Class 6 project was a food drive that benefited the RCMA child care center of Belle Glade. The Redlands Christian Migrant Association provides care and education for the children of migrant farmworkers. It was founded in South Florida in the 1960s.

As the ELDP Class 6 walked into the RCMA center of Belle Glade with a busload of food, we were greeted with warm smiles and enthusiasm by the center director Miss Green and the rest of the center staff.

During our tour, the love and passion Green has for RCMA was evident. She grew up in a farmworker family. Like the children at the center,

she lived mostly in Belle Glade but traveled up the eastern United States as the crops moved north. RCMA's Belle Glade center serves about 60 children from infant to 5 years old. To attend, the children have to meet migration and income requirements.

Our group was overwhelmed by the joy on the children's faces because they had visitors – and "a giant," as one Class 6 member was called.

The center strives to get the children "school ready." Green explained that most migrant children are behind in literacy and health when they start public school. So RCMA provides the children with hearing, dental, vision and general health screenings, along with early childhood education and family counseling.

The center also par-

ticipates in the Thirty Million Words initiative. Many migrant children have heard 30 million fewer words than their peers when they reach school age. Research shows that when children start school that far behind, they are usually behind in literacy for their entire education. To combat this problem, the center encourages the families to read to their children and communicate as a family, especially during the crucial language learning ages from infancy to age 3.



Class 6 donated a busload of food to the Redlands Christian Migrant Association child care center in Belle Glade.





## Southern Gardens: From vertical integration to stewardship

**D**uring the ELDP's South Florida Production Tour in January, Class 6 had the opportunity of touring the truly state-of-the-art processing facility of Southern Gardens Citrus. President Dan Casper and his team met with the class and discussed the challenges facing the citrus industry and how Southern Gardens is combating those challenges. Florida's citrus production has been steadily declining since the 2004-2005 hurricane season. Due to HLB, the industry has experienced rising costs in production, a reduction in fruit quality and availability and increasing competition with cheap imports from Mexico and Brazil.



By **Andrew Bryan Duda**  
Ranches

By vertically integrating the company from nursery to juice plant, Southern Gardens can guarantee a healthy and available supply of citrus to help fill their processing plant's 56 million gallons of cold storage capacity. Currently, Southern Gardens contributes 30 to 40 percent of the plant's processing capacity. This allows for other growers within the area to have their fruit processed at the Clewiston plant, ensuring the security of jobs and support for the local economy.

Even though the plant has a processing capacity of 15 million boxes of fruit annually, citrus juice isn't the only commodity produced at Southern Gardens. The citrus plant prides itself on being a 100 percent zero-waste facility. This means the many byproducts that are produced during the juicing process, such as food and beverage extracts, oils used in various cleaning products, as well as cattle feed from the solids are not wasted. Not only is the Southern Gardens operation a leader within the industry, it is a leader in environmental stewardship as well.



## Lipman Farms takes social responsibility to new levels

**S**ituated between organic farms in Loxahatchee, vertically integrated Lipman Produce grows a wide variety of tomatoes. Jamie Williams, director of farming operations, gave Class 6 an in-depth, behind-the-scenes tour of a day in the life on Farm 9 at Lipman, which operates in four states. With around 1,000 acres of production and around 1,500 workers during harvest, it's essential for the company to have a system that encourages efficient harvest and ensures worker security.



By **Emily Buckley Jones**  
Walker LLP

When it comes to labor, Lipman uses the H-2A guest-worker program and recruits domestic workers. H-2A increases the grower's ability to attract skilled, dependable workers, Williams said. Lipman prides itself on transparent employee policies, he added. Employees are clocked in as soon as they enter the property and are provided transportation to and from work. Lipman also provides housing for the vast majority of its workers. Furthermore, Lipman participates in the Fair Food Program, a campaign by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers that supports wage increases and improved labor environments.

Lipman conducts annual training for its employees and is constantly improving policies, Williams said. During two unannounced annual audits, more than 90 percent of the workforce is interviewed and the entire operation is under the microscope. From the top down, Lipman takes the environment of its workforce very seriously, Williams said.





## J & J is truly a ‘family of farms’

One of our last stops was at J & J Family of Farms. We were warmly greeted by Lynn Rundle, CEO, his leadership team and field supervisors. J&J dates back more than 30 years when Jimmy and Jerry Erneston developed a system for connecting local farmers and farms to the wholesale network. Not long after, the company began investing in local farm operations to establish a year-round supply of produce to its customers. This community of growers has evolved into today's J & J Family of Farms.

Today J & J Family of Farms has locations in North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Mexico. With more than 1,200 acres in Florida alone, it specializes in summer squash, cucumbers, eggplant and a variety of peppers.



By **Rachel Giles Bedner**  
**Growers, Inc.**

J & J employs more than 300 workers at its South Florida location.

The farm we visited in Boynton Beach had rows of healthy eggplant and bell peppers growing and being harvested. The company prefers to pack as close to harvest as possible to ensure that quality and freshness is preserved. We observed a packing crew during our visit where workers steadily graded and sorted eggplant. Suited up in gloves, hairnets and aprons, they checked each item before carefully wrapping it in waxed paper and placing it in a box. We learned that this crew can pack more than 2,000 boxes a day.

We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of growing in the area. The soil is ideal for the commodity type, but urban development can make it difficult, especially when loud motors and operating pumps run late into a rainy evening. Nonetheless, the team at J & J works hard to make good use of new technologies and build a true farming community in the area.



## Bedner's market reaches out to the public



By **Tony Flottesmesch**  
**Lipman Family Farms**

Our South Florida farm trip concluded at Bedner Growers Inc. We had a chance to peruse the market, which features every fresh fruit and vegetable that you could imagine. From there, Marie Bedner was gracious enough to take the time to tell us about their farm and market, which has been so successful that they recently opened another location. We were then treated to a tour of the farm where we saw the U-pick areas, the crops that are grown there,

and some of the wildlife.

Bedner's Farm Fresh Market is a place where customers and visitors get to interact with the farm. They offer tours to the school kids, zombie paintball, U-pick, and a month-long pumpkin patch in October, which is the kickoff to the season after our typical quiet Florida summers.

We heard about water and labor being key issues facing our industry, but one that doesn't get as much attention is the general public's lack of knowledge about our industry. The Bedner operation is a great way to close this knowledge gap. Hopefully when customers see how crops are grown and young people who take the tours spread the information to others, some of the misconceptions

about agriculture will begin to disappear. Although, there may still be times when there are tough issues to explain to customers, such as when markets are at extremes (as they are now) and crops are sometimes left in the fields instead of harvested.







## ELDP News

■ **Adam Trott** of Rabo AgriFinance (**Class 1**) was promoted to managing director – financial analyst manager for the Southeast region recently. Adam said that his region covers Florida to Virginia along the Atlantic coast. He's very pleased that this new position will allow him to make an even greater impact on the ag industry through mentoring others in sound and practical ag financing practices.



▲ **Sam (Class 3) and Jaqui Glucksman** welcomed **Isla Liana Glucksman** to their family on November 17, 2016. Isla weighed 7 pounds, 3 ounces and was 19 inches long.



▲ **Tom Mitchell** of Riverfront Packing (**Class 2**) (at left) recently represented the Florida citrus industry with a delegation that visited Congressional representatives in Washington.



▲ Congratulations to **Amber (Class 2) and Matt Maloney** on the birth of **Cora June Maloney**. She was born on January 25, weighed 7.8 pounds and was 20.5 inches long.

### *A special thank you to the sponsors on this trip:*

- Bus sponsorship – Florida's Natural Growers Foundation
- Lunch sponsorship – A. Duda & Sons
- Dinner sponsorship – Farm Credit of Florida
- Dinner sponsorship – Bayer



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