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Reflections

# EMERGING TIMES

*... growing toward the future*

## Class 5 looks back on a year full of learning and connecting



Class 5 (left to right): Josh Temple (DuPont Crop Protection), Ashley Layson (Farm Credit of Florida), Bradley Ferguson (Straughn Farms), Casey Simmons Runkles (Simmons Farms, Inc.), John Evans (Maury L. Carter & Associates, Inc.), Amanda McClure (West Coast Tomato/ Building Cleaning Solutions), Marshal Sewell (Semini's Vegetable Seed), Kevin Yue (Lipman Produce), Lauren Graham (The Andersons), Dustin Lowe (Lake Catherine Blueberries), Leigh Ann Wynn (Warner University), and Ben Lahr (Driscoll's).



Class 5 of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program is wrapping up its year together. From the first introductions at the annual convention in 2015 to the legislator visits in Tallahassee, to the final trip to California's Salinas Valley, these young professionals have taken it

all in and formed a strong network along the way. In this final special edition of Emerging Times, the class members reflect on some highlights of the past year as well as how the program will help them as they move forward with their careers.



## A new perspective on the ag industry



by Lauren Graham  
The Andersons, Inc.

As I celebrate my two-year anniversary of moving to Florida from Ohio, I have a great deal to be thankful for. With little background in agriculture, I was eager to learn about the industry in Florida.

I was fortunate to be selected to participate in the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program. This program has provided me the hands-on opportunity to experience Florida agriculture in a unique learning environment. I was able to connect with a group of leaders who empowered each other and continue to do so even after the completion of the program. Their insight and knowledge continues to develop my knowledge of the industry every day.

Each trip was unique and provided a perspective that cannot be taught in an office or classroom setting. Having the opportunity to be front and center in Tallahassee in front of key politicians was eye-opening. It demonstrated the importance of using your voice to the state to take action. The growers and ag professionals are truly one-of-a-kind people. They were more than willing to share their triumphs and hardships. Agriculture is a truly honest industry, and I am blown away by the amount of information everyone is willing to share. Everyone should be required to participate in this class!

This program is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I have a new perspective on the agriculture industry from marketing to politics to growing operations and more. Thank you to all who contribute money to fund this program as well as the time and effort of all who participate in keeping this program running.

## Getting a chance to connect and serve



by Ashley Layson  
Farm Credit of Florida

*"You connect. We serve."*

Not only is this a great slogan for the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association – it is also the perfect description of my year in the Emerging Leader Development Program. Throughout the year we were given the distinct opportunity to both connect and serve.

We connected with other young professionals who shared our own burning passion for agriculture. We connected with state lawmakers to tell the Florida ag story through open doors that are normally not as accessible. We connected with boots in the fields of the best farming operations across the state to hear inspiring stories of success through hard work and dedication. We connected with growers in California where the climate and natural resources were different from ours but the work ethic and thirst for innovation was the same.

We served by telling our story of pride in agriculture to all who would listen. We served by providing food to the migrant workers' children in Belle Glade. We served our classmates by growing relationships and walking alongside each other.

But most of all we were served and connected by our outstanding leader, Sonia Tighe, who pushed us to be our best and give our best all while guiding us through the greatest experiences of our lives.

Thank you FFVA for this extraordinary opportunity. Thank you to our families and employers for allowing us to set out on this amazing journey. And thank you, Sonia, for your guidance, your leadership and your unwavering dedication to Florida farmers.

## Developing respect for all of agriculture



by Josh Temple  
DuPont Crop Protection

It has been an honor and a privilege to be a part of the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program Class 5. Growing up on a small row crop and cattle farm in Louisiana, I never would have dreamed I would be involved in such a diverse fruit and vegetable industry. I come from a background of research and development, so the exposure gained to all aspects of agribusiness will be invaluable throughout my career.

Every session provided me with new insights into Florida agriculture and networking opportunities with FFVA members. It was most interesting to see all the work and planning that goes into growing fresh produce, from planting, production, packing, sales, shipping and marketing. Each step is an important part of delivering high-quality fruits and vegetables to happy consumers.

My favorite sessions were our visits with policymakers in Tallahassee and our production trips in South Florida and California. These sessions have been as important as any class I took during my agricultural studies. The friendships that I have made with the ELDP class will last a lifetime. I hope to continue to be involved with the FFVA through committees, the annual convention and industry sponsorships.

I appreciate FFVA's commitment to developing future leaders in the Florida agriculture industry. The experience is an invaluable opportunity for a young agriculture professional, and I will be forever indebted to the FFVA for this opportunity. In closing I would like to thank Sonia Tighe for all of her hard work and planning with the ELDP class. I have never met someone who works so tirelessly at delivering the absolute best educational sessions and experiences.



## Building a network into the future

by Kevin Yue  
Lipman Produce

It has been a privilege and honor to have been part of the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program. When I first joined the ELDP, I was not sure what to expect. I had just moved to Florida about 10 months before, working in an industry I did not know much about. I had come from being an engineering consultant working in the energy sector. Although I had met a number of people within Lipman already, joining the ELDP has given me a chance to expand my network both professionally and personally.

Unlike others in my class, I came into the program without an agricultural background. Although I initially thought that was going to be an impediment, I reflected on this and realized that I probably brought a different viewpoint on agriculture, as I have a background in environmental engineering and have been using my engineering skillset to ensure Lipman is compliant with environmental regulations on all levels.

The ELDP has opened up new avenues of networking for me over this past year. My classmates and I have had memorable times at each of our sessions and we looked forward to attending the next one. I was impressed with the breadth and depth of the knowledge and experiences of each person. Over the past year as I have gotten to know them as well as FFVA, I have grown more comfortable in the ag industry.

A special thank you goes out to Sonia Tighe for leading us at all these events. Her drive and passion for this program were evident, and she has connected us to agriculture on many levels. No one knows what the future will hold, but the next generation of the agricultural industry will have strong leaders, some of whom had a start in the FFVA ELDP.



During their South Florida production trip, ELDP Class 5 was joined by members of Western Growers' Future Volunteer Leaders Program. The groups toured a variety of vegetable operations, including fields and packinghouses.

## Tremendous exposure to Florida agriculture



by Ben Lahr  
Driscoll's

I was very excited to participate in this program, and that excitement was sustained throughout the entire year. As a California native who's lived in Florida for the past seven years, I found that this program offered me tremendous exposure to even more of Florida agriculture.

From fields of sugarcane to the halls of the state Senate, I got a brief glimpse at life in quite a range of other peoples' shoes. Through this exposure, and subsequent education, I have been able to get involved with groups and committees I might not have otherwise participated in.

Our myriad travels served to bring together

classmates from all different parts and functions of Florida, allowing us to share our lives and experiences. The more we talked, the closer we became and we could see that, even though we are all different, we share many concerns and viewpoints.

This truth is not limited to our group alone, either, but rather was clearly evident in our trip to South Florida where we were joined by leadership program participants from Western Growers in California. We again found that, though we are quite different, particularly geographically, we are nevertheless quite similar, facing many of the same challenges and issues. Not that we were able to solve any major issues, but we were able to discuss different approaches and learn from one another, leaving us each with new perspectives and insights.

This program has truly been invaluable to me. I have appreciated each of our hosts, and I would like to thank Driscoll's for allowing me to participate in Class 5 of the FFVA Emerging Leadership Development Program. Above all, though, I would like to thank Sonia Tighe for her effort in making this program happen.



## Program yields a network of friends



by Amanda McClure  
West Coast Tomato/  
Coldwell Banker Richard Ellis

The ELDP provides young people with a deeper understanding of different agricultural issues in Florida and throughout the United States. I am a fifth-generation member of a tomato-growing family, and this program helped me understand the importance for the next generation to be a strong voice for agriculture.

Our class spent several days in Tallahassee, where we met with various legislators to discuss the importance of the agriculture industry in Florida and ensure they were properly informed as to various issues. This experience made me realize how important it is on a community level to reach out to the different legislators with factual information so they are better able to act on behalf of Florida farmers.

We also traveled to South Florida and California, where we were exposed to a variety of different crops that some of us had never seen. These experiences prompted discussions on different threats facing the agriculture industry that all farmers can relate to such as labor and increasing environmental regulations.

Gaining exposure to these different crops also gave us all insight as to different techniques and technologies farmers are using that will likely pave the way for helping to sustain Florida agriculture. We saw mechanical harvesting, heard from various farmers as to different sources of labor, and learned how the FFVA is able to help farmers integrate procedures to meet increasing government regulations.

Overall, the most memorable part of the program for me was getting to know the other young leaders in our class. I now have a close network of friends throughout the state who all have a common interest in being a voice for agriculture.

## Becoming a well-rounded advocate for ag



by John Evans  
Maury L. Carter & Associates Inc.

As we all know, the world's population will reach 9 billion people by the year 2050. That means farmers, ranchers, growers and agriculturalists will be responsible for feeding all of those people. Naturally, we know that Florida is a great place to be in agriculture. This program has cemented my belief that Florida's agriculturalists are in a unique position to accept the challenge of meeting that demand. Florida is and will continue to be a global leader in feeding the world and producing agricultural products for centuries to come. Not only that, but I see this program as an innovator in producing leaders for our industry that will have a lasting impact on our state for centuries to come.

Name the issue, and we touched on it during this program: water, land management practices, GMOs, citrus greening, labor, algae blooms and more. We developed knowledge and truth behind each issue and learned to implement it in our careers and life. In my interaction with the general public, with information I have learned through this program, I am more equipped to help educate those outside the industry. I am a more well-rounded advocate.

To whom much is given, much is expected. This program was a gift. I have always been convicted to do much with what I was given, and this program was a reminder to me and my classmates that we have a duty to our industry to advocate and lead for our state. As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. This program has sharpened our class for leadership in Florida agriculture.



Les Baucum (orange shirt) of United States Sugar Corporation gave the group a detailed presentation of how sugar cane is produced and milled, including controlled burns designed to rid the plants of excessive dead plant material before it's sent to the mill.



## Forging friendships, learning lessons



by Casey Simmons Runkles  
Simmons Farms, Inc.

What an amazing opportunity it has been to be a part of the ELDP Class 5. I will be forever grateful for the friendships, the lessons learned and the opportunity to obtain a better grasp of Florida agriculture. Growing up in a family that has farmed for several generations, I thought I had a pretty good idea of the issues and concerns that our profession faces. Thanks to the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association for the vision to train young leaders to in all aspects of our business.

Throughout the year we were afforded the chance to see behind the scenes of many operations, from vegetables to sugarcane. To those who have shared tours of your business with Class 5, thank you. Your transparency to answer our questions truly allows us to be an advocate for Florida agriculture. I am very familiar with my industry, but I now have a point of reference to share what you are doing with others.

Thanks to Sonia Tighe for her planning and dedication to this program. She is an integral part of its continuing success. Her vast knowledge of the industry and the people she asks to speak or give tours of their business is what makes it so valuable. Avery LeFils, thank you for your hard work with this program, Class 6 will be missing an important part of the experience. Best of luck with your new career. I would highly recommend to anyone who wants to make a difference in agriculture to get involved with the program, whether it is applying or sharing your knowledge with the participants.

## A clearer concept of the big picture



by Marshal Sewell  
Seminis Vegetable Seed

As a young boy growing up on my family's fruit and vegetable operation in Plant City, I naturally assumed that our humble hometown was the epicenter of global agriculture. As I grew older, however, I began broadening my horizons and learning more about our amazing industry. To this day, I continue to be impressed by the size and scope of the agricultural supply chain in our state, nation and world.

Having the opportunity to participate in the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program has certainly helped me to view our industry from a larger perspective and to solidify my love and respect for fruit and vegetable production. In my year with the program I have observed diverse operations throughout our state and country, all the while learning about new crops and production methods. Additionally, I have witnessed the efforts taking place behind the scenes through FFVA staff and state legislators that help ensure the success and longevity of agriculture. And, most importantly, I have grown my personal network to include some amazing classmates and fellow industry members who share my same passion for agriculture.

I truly appreciate all of the FFVA members who have supported our group throughout this program. Your investment in us has not gone unnoticed and I hope that you will see a great return as we, one day, become leaders within our fields. I also strongly encourage any young member to consider applying for the ELDP. It is an amazing opportunity to discover new aspects of the industry, meet many new people, and reflect upon your own personal goals and development.

## A chance to expand horizons, knowledge



by Bradley Ferguson  
Straughn Farms

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of EDLP Class 5. It has been an amazing experience. Over the past year, I have been able to expand my horizons from just being down in the trenches of production agriculture to seeing the big picture. I learned so much about the diversity of the crops in Florida as well as the diversity of issues facing agriculture and all the work that FFVA does to support our industry. There have been countless networking opportunities and many new friends made along the way.

At the 2015 convention in Palm Beach, I got to hear and learn from great speakers such as Dr. Kevin Folta, Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, and Tucker Carlson, who covered a range of issues such as GMOs, water policy and politics. During our first session at the FFVA offices, I learned about how FFVA is structured and the range of services the association provides to its members. The trip to Tallahassee really opened my eyes to the inner workings of our state government and how much work FFVA does advocating for our industry. The South Florida production tour exposed me to an amazing part of Florida agriculture that I had not seen before, facing its own set of issues. The California production tour was a great experience as well. Although the soils and climate are very different from Florida, the California industry is facing many of the same issues as we do.

Through this experience, I am inspired to stay involved with FFVA. I would like to thank Sonia Tighe, Mike Stuart, Avery LeFils, Lisa Lochridge, Jill Dunlop and everyone else involved at FFVA for making such a great program possible.



## Expanding my 'range' over the past year



by Leigh Ann Wynn  
Warner University

When I look back on this past year, being a part of the Class 5 of the FFVA Emerging Leaders Development Program was a very big highlight. I come from a cattle ranching family, but I was interested in getting to know more about the fruit and vegetable side of agriculture. I was very excited that I was chosen to participate. What a privilege.

Walking into that room at The Breakers at last year's convention, you could tell most of us were nervous. I think most of us can laugh now. Wow, have we gotten to know each other so much better than that day in 2015!

The leadership development committee did a great job in ensuring that there was diversity across the group. From citrus growers, seed salesmen and marketers to ag real estate brokers, cattle ranchers and strawberry growers, our group really brought a range of knowledge and opinions.

With my role at Warner University, I found this program and what I learned from other participants and the farm tours to be a real asset to take back to our agriculture students.



During the Tallahassee "drive-in" with members of FFVA's board of directors and advocacy committee, the group got to talk with (and pose with) House Speaker Steve Crisafulli.

This program has taught me more about myself, FFVA and the role it plays for those in the industry, and my fellow comrades in the trenches. We have a battle to fight daily for agriculture!

The California trip was the real highlight of the program for me. Again, there was diversity with the opportunity to learn about different commodities, different climates and different issues. Despite those differences, we still understand the West Coast's issues. We're all in the same boat ... we just may not worry daily about issues of artichokes and garlic.



*Congratulations to Class 5 on your graduation from  
the Emerging Leader Development Program.*

*We look forward to your continued involvement in FFVA!*