

EMERGING TIMES

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SOUTH FLORIDA PRODUCTION



On the road again

South Florida was the setting for Class 7's most recent trip in February as the group toured farms and packinghouses for 2½ days. From Belle Glade to Boynton Beach to Clewiston, the class talked with growers of sugar cane, celery, lettuce and more. They got an up-close look at citrus processing and the ravages of citrus greening, and they sat in on a meeting of the Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida.

The tour opened the doors for class members to discuss with company founders, farm managers and others topics such as water use, production practices, labor issues and pest and disease pressures. At each tour stop, class members and hosts exchanged thoughts and perspectives about growing specialty crops in Florida.

This year the group was joined on the South Florida trip by four members of Western Growers Association's Future Volunteer Leaders from California and two WGA staff members. It was an opportunity for Class 7 participants to extend their networks beyond Florida.

Class 7's next session will be a trip in July to tour fruit and vegetable production in California's agriculture-rich Salinas Valley. It is the culmination of the yearlong program, followed by graduation at FFVA's annual convention in Naples on Sept. 25.

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SUSTAINING SPONSOR



J&J introduces us to proprietary pepper branded ‘Sunny Sweet’



By
Philip Grigsby
Premier Ag Finance

On the first day of our South Florida production tour, we had the opportunity to visit one of J&J Family of Farms’ bell pepper fields in Boynton Beach. We met with Peter Hamburg and Angela Gamiotea, who both work on the production side for J&J. On the farm we visited they were growing traditional green bell peppers as well as newer varieties of yellow and red bell peppers. The newer colors are bringing both a unique marketing aspect

as well as enhanced flavor to the fresh vegetable market. Hamburg explained that Mexican imports of bell peppers are dumped into our markets at less than half the price of American production because of cheap labor and fewer regulations. This was a great firsthand lesson regarding NAFTA renegotiations currently under way, demonstrating how we are at a great disadvantage in fresh produce trade compared with our neighbors to the south.



J&J is involved in the brokering and production of produce and is progressive on the development side of produce as well. On the same farm that multiple varieties of bell peppers were grown, J&J also is growing its proprietary breed of pepper branded “Sunny Sweet.” This is a smaller, tear-drop shaped sweet pepper, and I can say from personal experience that it has a great flavor. In all of the different farms we observed on the tour, this location was particularly interesting because of the residential and commercial development around the farm. There are a lot more homes and commercial buildings being planted in the immediate vicinity than there are crops.



Sweet corn exchange encourages market stability



By **Justin Pettit**
Blue Hammock Farms

Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida hosted the ELDP and Western Growers' Future Volunteer Leaders for lunch on our South Florida production tour. It was a unique experience, allowing us to learn more about sweet corn market-

ing. During lunch, a vendor's representative informed the group about their boxes and what attributes make their product a better choice over the wooden boxes growers currently use. Dr. Marcio Resende, a University of Florida sweet corn breeder, also talked about sweet corn genetics. Having a corn exchange meeting that brings the industry's growers together is an excellent opportunity to have speakers and to get the attention of everyone in the room. It also gives the exchange group the opportunity to

have open debate about vital industry issues such as promotion and supply.

Because the Sunshine Sweet Corn Growers of Florida created an exchange, it has allowed the market to be more stable, and with 20 or so voting members they can come to terms on a variety of matters directly involving and impacting the sweet corn industry, which increases market stability. One of the major topics discussed in the meeting involved a novel method to try to improve promotional partnerships with the retail sector. SSCFF President Paul Allen led a discussion that involved "discount promotional pricing." Allen said that late April and early May can be a struggle when trying to move large volumes of product. Listening to the growers' real issues and concerns in an open forum such as this was an excellent way for the ELDP class to understand how the growers use an exchange to resolve issues in an environment where everyone has an opportunity to be heard.





Lettuce talk about food safety



By **Adam Roe**
Wm. G. Roe and Sons

We arrived in one of the fields managed by TKM Bengard Farms to see lettuce harvest in full swing. Class 7's own Myles Basore of TKM gave the group a brief overview of the focus of their operations while we drove in. Their focus is on food safety and delivering the highest quality iceberg and romaine to their customers. Once in the field, we were joined by Ethan and Stephen Basore. Ethan showed us how



the lettuce is harvested using precision custom knives that are designed to cut the lettuce in the field to the

customers' needs. Harvesting around a million pounds of lettuce a day in different packs and varieties requires coordination between many different limbs of the operation.

Stephen Basore, one of the six Basore brothers who manage TKM's operations, took time both in the field and at the packing cooler to talk with us about food safety. TKM has put food safety and consumer protection at the forefront of its business. In addition to adhering to BMPs and GAPs, TKM goes above and beyond to set the company apart on food safety.

With a strong family bond, a commitment to customer service and high safety standards, TKM Bengard Farms was an inspiring visit.





Class 7 enjoys ‘mountain-top’ experience at Co-op

The highlight of our visit to the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida, hosted by Barbara Miedema, vice president of public affairs and communications, was a trip to “Sugar Mountain.” No – this isn’t a ski resort or vacation hot spot.



By
Brent Johnson
FMC
Corporation

By most people’s standards, it’s no resort. But for those of us in Florida agriculture, this Sugar Mountain is more important than a resort. Literally, it’s a mountain of sugar, produced right here in Florida, rising to the ceiling in a warehouse at the Cooperative in Belle Glade. And it’s a true testament to the importance of the sugar industry to Florida agriculture.

Not to be overshadowed by Sugar Mountain in all of its glory, Miedema spoke to Class 7 about the history of the Cooperative, how it works, and its responsibilities and accomplishments in the Everglades Agricultural Area. The Cooperative is owned by 45 family farms and provides employment for more than 3,000 people. The responsibilities of the Cooperative are the processing, transport, harvest and marketing of their shareholders’ product. Annually, the Cooperative and its shareholders produce 3.7 million tons of sugar cane and nearly a half-million tons of raw sugar, making it the nation’s largest producer of raw sugar. All of this has been done by shareholders through formation of the ASR (American Sugar Refiners) Group. Importantly, the sugar cane farmers pay a self-imposed “agriculture privilege tax” and have succeeded in reducing the amount of phosphorous leaving their farms by 55 percent during the past decade.



R.C. Hatton’s efficient machinery keeps sweet corn moving

As our bus pulled in to R.C. Hatton, the first thing that caught our eye was the crawler Big Bertha (pictured on Page 1). Big Bertha was built in the mid- to late 1960s and was famous for being called whenever anyone or anything was stuck. Today, Big Bertha rests on the corner of R.C. Hatton’s property in South Bay as a tribute to the growers and their families who made farming in the Glades what it is today. Even though it’s been more than 50 years since it was built, the crawler still works as good as ever.



By
Catherine Cellon
Duda Farm
Fresh Foods

Dan Allen was our host and showed off his favorite machinery, the sweet corn line. The corn line also was built in the late 1960s, and even though it’s the oldest piece of machinery at R.C. Hatton, Allen said it causes him the fewest problems. In the spring, the corn is hand-picked in the field and brought to the line, where it’s graded and packed into crates. When the corn line is up and running it can fill approximately three tractor-trailer loads in an hour. When asked if R.C. Hatton would ever switch to mechanical harvesting, Allen said it wouldn’t happen anytime soon. However, that day may come because of increasing costs and a shortage of workers.

Class 7 reaches out to RCMA with food drive donations



By **Maria Cavazos**
R.C. Hatton

Before embarking on our South Florida tour, Class 7 members collected food items for the Redlands Christian Migrant Association's Belle Glade center. On Day 2 of the trip, we stopped there to drop off the donated food.

RCMA is a child development center founded in 1965. The center provides quality child care and early education for migrant farmworkers and rural low-income families. Over the years, RCMA has grown from two centers to 71, now serving 21 Florida counties. It also has expanded its offering of programs.

When Class 7 arrived with the busload of food items for the center, we were greeted by staffers Rachel McMillan and Paula Rounsavall. They were very grateful for the delivery and gave us an overview of RCMA's background. The non-perishable food items would be given to the families of the 72 children enrolled at the center.

They explained some of the additional services they provide to the children, such as dental, hearing and vision screenings. They also encourage parents to read and work with their children at an early age to help give them a head start on development.



U.S. Sugar works hard for sweet results



By **Shane Rogers**
J&J Family of Farms

It's hard to imagine that the sugar we use in our everyday life is the end result of a highly elaborate and sophisticated process. But the 800,000 tons of refined sugar produced annually by United States Sugar Corporation comes from a combination of more than 200,000 acres of sugar cane, 2,500 employees, a railroad network, sugar mills and refineries.

Sugar cane agronomist Les Baucum met with our group at the edge of a field to show us exactly how harvesting sugar cane begins – with a controlled burn. This process is important because it removes the outer leaves and other waste products to ensure crews harvest only what will be used. “We



burn through about 80 acres in 15 or 20 minutes depending on the amount of moisture in the field,” Baucum noted.

Once the fire is out, the harvesting crews get to work at a diligent pace. The sugar cane is taken from the field to one of the company's many rail lines, by which it will be transferred to a mill. “The goal of U.S. Sugar is to get the sugar cane harvested and to the

mill in eight hours or less,” he said.

U.S. Sugar's rail system keeps the operation moving very efficiently and drives volume. “The mill can receive up to 1,000 rail cars per day. And each rail car holds about 40 tons of cane,” Baucum said.

During the season, U.S. Sugar will harvest and grind sugar 24 hours a day, seven days a week.





Southern Gardens faces citrus challenges head-on



By **Daniel Rifa**
U.S. Sugar Corporation

At our stop at Southern Gardens Citrus, a subsidiary of United States Sugar Corporation, we were welcomed by Jim Snively, vice president of citrus groves, and processing plant manager Denise Roth. Southern Gardens has 12,500 acres of groves, a citrus nursery near Gainesville, and one of the newest juice processing facilities in the industry.

Snively described the dire situation Southern Gardens is facing – along with the entire industry – as a result of citrus canker, multiple hurricanes and citrus

greening. Citrus greening has been the latest obstacle in the uphill battle that this industry has faced and the hope is that through breeding a resistant tree will be found. For now, growers are replanting groves and using plant nutrition to combat the problem with some small success. This year's crop estimate was higher than last year; however, Hurricane Irma came into the picture and as a result it will be the smallest crop since citrus greening was first discovered in Florida.

After an overview from Snively, we toured the processing plant and learned about the juicing process. Roth showed us the 56 one-million-gallon juice storage tanks that provide a total capacity of 56 million gallons. She also explained the importance that quality of juice plays in who receives what type of juice. Every batch of juice is different from the



next, and each buyer has a preferred type or blend of juice.

It was impressive to see how nothing is wasted at the plant. Southern Gardens uses all of the peels and unused solids to create pellets to be sold for animal feed.

Overall, it was an amazing experience that highlighted the adversities as well as the new opportunities that the Florida citrus industry is facing.

Grapefruit grove displays ravages of greening disease



By **Myles Basore**
TKM Bengard

Dan Richey and David Craig hosted our class on a 1,000-acre grapefruit grove owned by the Scott family in Okeechobee. Diseases that have made a huge impact on the citrus industry throughout the state have affected their grove as well. Richey pointed out the thick trees that were planted through the grove to reduce the amount of citrus canker spreading through the groves by wind. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, 60 million boxes

of grapefruit were produced every year. Today that number has dropped dramatically to about 4.7 million boxes. Urban development, canker, citrus greening and hurricanes have contributed to the decline in citrus production. Despite the odds, "we are facing a very challenging time, but this is not the end of our industry," Richey said.

Richey explained one of his significant concerns about harmful plant pests and diseases coming into Florida through our ports. For decades, U.S. rules required certain fruits to enter the United States at cooler northern ports above the 39th parallel. The rule was intended to allow any foreign pests and diseases to die off in colder climates before produce was shipped south.



Richey explained that now shipments are allowed to enter the port of Miami if they are treated aboard ship. This is of major concern for Florida agriculture, Richey said. "Our success is dependent upon us spending the same amount of time focusing on what is happening inside our fence line as what is happening on the outside of our fence line," he said. This is a challenge to the younger generation to get involved with committees and organizations that inform us on the decisions being made that may directly affect our industries.

Crews use techniques for most efficient sweet corn harvesting



By **Frankie Montalvo**
Glades Formulating Corp.

Sweet corn growers Chris Hopper and Daniel Rifa (a member of Class 7) of United States Sugar Corporation showed our class a traditional sweet corn harvest with an experienced group of workers. The harvest was at a field north of Canal Point in the ghost town of Sand Cut (which formerly and famously had a sign proclaiming Population – Winter: 8, Summer: 7).

Hopper and Rifa explained the process of sweet corn harvesting to

our class in detail. When asked how the corn is harvested given an ear's vertical orientation, Hopper manually demonstrated how harvesters twist the ear then pull it down. Additionally, he explained that experienced crews have developed smart techniques – for example, instead of using a full-arm throw, a simple wrist flick from the stalk to the harvest vehicle saves considerable energy.

Hopper noted that experienced crews such as the one at the field we visited use the twist, downward pull and wrist-flick techniques to make the work more efficient. This dovetailed into a conversation about the difficulty of finding harvest workers. As the more experienced crews become less

prevalent, growers are relying on newer harvest crews who have to gain the institutional knowledge as they grow into their roles.

Harvest crews typically pack the corn into traditional 48-count wooden crates. Retailers are using newer packages such as four- or five-count tray packages and microwavable packages. However, traditional wooden crates remain the standard for the industry.

Class 7's experience with Hopper and Rifa showed us more about the backbone of the fresh market sweet corn industry – the 48-count wooden crate. Our class' earlier trip to the Florida Sweet Corn Exchange meeting showed us how business is conducted in this construct.





GMI showcases new parsley crop

We were met with an unusual sight as we exited the bus at Growers Management Inc. In the land of sugar cane and sweet corn, Paul and Derek Orsenigo rolled out the red carpet



By
Adam Roe
Wm. G. Roe
and Sons

as they experiment with growing parsley. But instead of red carpet, they are using 400-foot rows of plastic inlaid with drip-tape irrigation to produce the parsley. The farm is located on sand, a much different growing environment than the rich muck that makes up much of the Glades.

Derek Orsenigo, graduate of ELDP Class 2, walked us through the parsley growing process. The plants start as seedlings in a greenhouse, which are then transplanted by hand into holes in the plastic. The parsley is harvested two to four times during the course of the season. The purpose of the plastic is to minimize the amount of hand-weeding. "I'd rather a crew be harvesting than weeding," Paul Orsenigo said. That's something I think we can all get on board with, and GMI has ponied up to make that a reality.

The Orsenigos have many more trials planned using different plastics, soil types and varieties as they continue to drive efficiency, marketability and productivity.

Hundley Farms: Innovating in the EAA since the 1930s

Farming has been in the Hundley family since the 1930s. Over the decades the farm has expanded to 16,000 acres. The Hundley family grows an assortment of crops: sweet corn, sugar cane,



By **Myles Basore**
TKM Bengard

field corn, radishes, celery, green beans and cabbage. Sam Glucksman, a Class 3 graduate of ELDP, gave us a tour of the cabbage and radish operations. His role at Hundley Farms includes pest management and crop protection. Because of a shortage of cabbage in Homestead, the Hundleys have been growing the crop for the past two years. We applauded them for producing a bumper crop – it was beautiful.

The radish production was nothing short of amazing. We met a woman who has run the planter/bedder for more than 30 years. The machine presses a wide bed into the rich muck soil, followed by the planter. The cost- and labor-saving aspects of this piece of equipment put it at the top of its class. After the planter, we saw a radish mechanical harvester that pinched the leafy tops in between two conveyors, pulling radish plants out of the ground and depositing them into a trailer. The Hundleys are innovators in the Everglades Agricultural Area, and we learned a great deal from seeing their operation.



Duda cuts celery but not corners



By **Shane Rogers**
J&J Family of Farms

We traveled to Belle Glade to visit Duda's farming operation and to learn how the celery that's enjoyed in just about every home and restaurant begins its journey to tables across North America.

General Manager Sam Jones and Farm Manager Perry Yance joined our group and led us to a celery field that appeared to go all the way to the horizon. We linked up with a harvesting crew that was working its way through a field.

We watched as the crew tediously cut, washed, bagged and packed celery while the harvester crept forward. The work appeared painstaking but the crew carried it out with a high level of precision. Yance explained that each crew member has a specific skill. "A crew consists of about 42 people: 16 cutters, 16 packers, one person closing boxes, three to four stacking boxes and palletizing, one tractor operator, three truck drivers and a foreman."

Perry outlined what a crew can



accomplish in a day: "A typical day for a crew is about three acres and packing 3,200 cartons." During peak season, Duda will have five crews just like that one operating each day.

The crew takes a lot of pride cutting celery in the field. Perry explained the

effort that goes into the ground as well. "Our variety genetics program probably gives us the greatest edge, as we develop our own varieties," he said. "They are selected specifically at each location celery is grown and tailored to meet customer expectations."





ELDP News



Shine Taylor (Class 4) has a new role as the Integrated Field Sciences North America Technical Expert for Insect and Nematode Management for the agricultural division of DowDuPont.

Thank you to our trip sponsors:

Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida – providing lunch on Tuesday

Clayton Norman, Bayer – drinks on Tuesday

Ashley Layson, Farm Credit – providing dinner Wednesday night

Florida's Natural Growers – donation to offset bus costs



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