

EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

Volume 10 • Issue 1 | December 2020

INTRODUCTION: FFVA 101



CONTENTS

Working together to address the future of Florida citrus 2

An association that lives to give 3

A “how-to” on Florida agriculture 3

Effective crisis communication starts with being proactive..... 4

FFVA’s robust communications help members stay “in the know” 5

Labor continues to be top issue in Florida ag..... 6

Relief from transportation restrictions and COVID-19 impacts 6

Why NAFTA and the USMCA hurt our state so badly 7

State passes new law to improve Florida’s water quality 8

Florida tomatoes: Delivering the best quality to the market 9

ELDP News 9

H&A Farms prepares for future 10

Leading with a legacy in mind



By **Sherri Atwell**
Feeding Florida

In the inaugural meeting of the FFVA ELDP Class 10, we had the honor of hearing from FFVA President Mike Joyner in Maitland. Joyner opened the day by speaking to the group around leading with a legacy in mind. He spoke on how as “emerging leaders” in the agriculture industry, our legacy is how we want to be remembered. Joyner reminded us that what we do is as important as how we do

it and emphasized the importance of having mentors and being a mentor to others.

He also encouraged the group to make a list of our own guiding principles and to review them often. According to Joyner, each guiding principle should be the roadmap to our daily decisions as we walk in our leadership journey.

As a previous employee under Joyner, I have seen firsthand how the once chief of staff for former Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam leads with intention and impact. Joyner knows how to work with every step of the agriculture industry from state legislators and the Governor’s Cabinet to growers and packers. His leadership and advocacy will help secure a strong future for Florida agriculture.



Agriculture Division of DowDuPont™

SUSTAINING SPONSOR

Working together to address the future of Florida citrus



By **Frederico Boscolo**
Cultiva Farms USA

Florida's citrus industry has seen a continuous decline for the last two decades, with almost 50 percent fewer acres planted. Growers have faced pressure from residential and commercial development, imports from other continents, market changes and increasing pressure from diseases.

Lately, the biggest threats to the Florida citrus sector have been diseases, and in particular, citrus black spot, endemic in Florida since the 1980s, and citrus greening, which has been detected in different parts of the world, including China, South Africa and Europe.

There are interesting debates (science versus political interpretations) on how diseases are used around the world to hide protectionism practices to reduce imports from other countries and protect local productions. As an example, if the EU was to stop imports of oranges from Florida because of citrus black spot, this would put a serious, and potentially unjustified, threat on 30 percent of Florida citrus exports.

Currently, the Florida citrus sector is managed by the Citrus Administrative Committee and Florida Citrus Packers, which together monitor and coordinate the following areas:

- **Research**
- **Promotion**
- **Food safety**
- **Government regulation**

The aim is to promote, foster and encourage the business of marketing and the stabilization of markets for fresh Florida citrus fruit, and to handle cooperatively and collectively the common problems of its members.



The future of Florida citrus can be shiny again. New varieties and new “novel” production techniques are available and new production areas can be explored all thanks to technology. A new strategic line for the Florida citrus sector is ready to be explored to face more challenging but profitable markets.

Protecting Florida growers is imperative and supporting them to create a better future is crucial.



An association that lives to give

Did you know that being a FFVA member opens the door to a world of insight and information?



By **Sasha Burgin**
Burgin Farms

I was blown away upon learning how deeply FFVA cares for and responds to its members. Director of Membership Sonia Tighe explained to Class 10 how members have full access to all directors at any time and assistance with a wide range of issues. The association is available to assist members with food safety, labor, marketing, third-party registrations, and other industry issues. The association also has advocacy representatives working diligently in Tallahassee and Washington, D.C., to ensure that legislators are staying updated on all issues farmers face on a daily basis.

Sonia also explained to us that the association has seven policy committees that meet twice a year to discuss important topics in their individual fields. The committees are comprised of FFVA members serving two-year terms. The committees help to bring members from all branches of the industry together to discuss topics that need to be addressed and expanded upon.

Becoming a member is a simple process and can be very rewarding. There are two types of memberships, producer and trade. Included in your membership is access to the annual directory, networking opportunities, such as the ELDP program and involvement with a committee, and discounted registration for FFVA's annual convention.

Being in the Emerging Leader Development Program has already opened my eyes to all the avenues of information and assistance available through FFVA.



A “how-to” on Florida agriculture

Every member of Florida's agriculture industry should have the opportunity to hear Alan Hair's presentation on FFVA basics. Not only will it make you want



By **Ariel Bauer**
Hardee Fresh LLC

to become an FFVA member as soon as possible, but it is also a huge encouragement for the future of Florida agriculture.

For more than 70 years, FFVA has been a not-for-profit organization intentionally focusing its efforts on providing support for farmers where they need it the most. The organization boasts several subsidiary companies, including a third-party label registration, a mutual insurance company, a specialty crop foundation, and a resource for H-2A help, that all came about from a need from the farm that has evolved into the FFVA we all know today.

The 40-plus members of the board of directors and 25-plus staff members help facilitate seven different policy committees. These committees cover food safety and sustainability, advocacy, water and natural resources, production management, research, workforce and supply chain management. To be truly effective, the committees are comprised of industry experts in each given field. Committee members are then able to bring together their experiences and expertise to create solutions in real time. FFVA members can also have a voice in pressing issues by participating in forums, regional meetings, and the annual convention.

The benefit for members goes on to include newsletters, marketing help, a network of resources, crisis training, philanthropy opportunities, leadership development and more at just a phone call away. With the future of Florida agriculture facing such adversity, FFVA is a necessary tool to take on the challenge.



Effective crisis communication starts with being proactive



By **Nathan Carson**
Chemical Dynamics, Inc.

Crisis can take numerous forms, from natural disasters and E. coli outbreaks to the release of activist “gotcha” videos. And in today’s hyperactive news cycle, local events can become national news in a matter of hours. This makes effective crisis communication more important than ever for Florida agriculture. Addressing Class 10, outgoing Director of Public Affairs Lisa Lochridge, shared key takeaways for managing communication during a crisis.

It is crucial in effective crisis communication to be proactive. If agribusinesses and producers wait to develop a communication strategy until a crisis arrives, it is too late. The narrative of the crisis will be driven by outside entities.

The first element of being proactive is maintaining ties with media outlets as well as sustaining a notable social

media presence. For instance, agribusinesses and producers can engage with the media by writing op-eds in local magazines and newspapers or by making themselves available for interviews on ag-related topics. This will provide agriculture entities a list of media contacts to reach out to during a crisis. Providing credible information to consumers on social media on how their food is produced and how the agricultural industry supports local communities can build valuable goodwill.

The second aspect of being proactive is wargaming potential crisis scenarios. These scenarios are constructed by identifying potential crises, the effect to outside stakeholders, the likelihood of occurrence, and the impacts to the brand. Once these scenarios are constructed, a team in charge of fielding media questions should develop responses that convey a single coherent message. This message should be periodically reviewed by leadership and tested to ensure the accuracy of the points, as well as identifying gaps in the responses.

Having a crisis communications strategy in place will help Florida agriculture better respond to possible crises that might negatively impact the future of the industry.





FFVA’s robust communications help members stay “in the know”



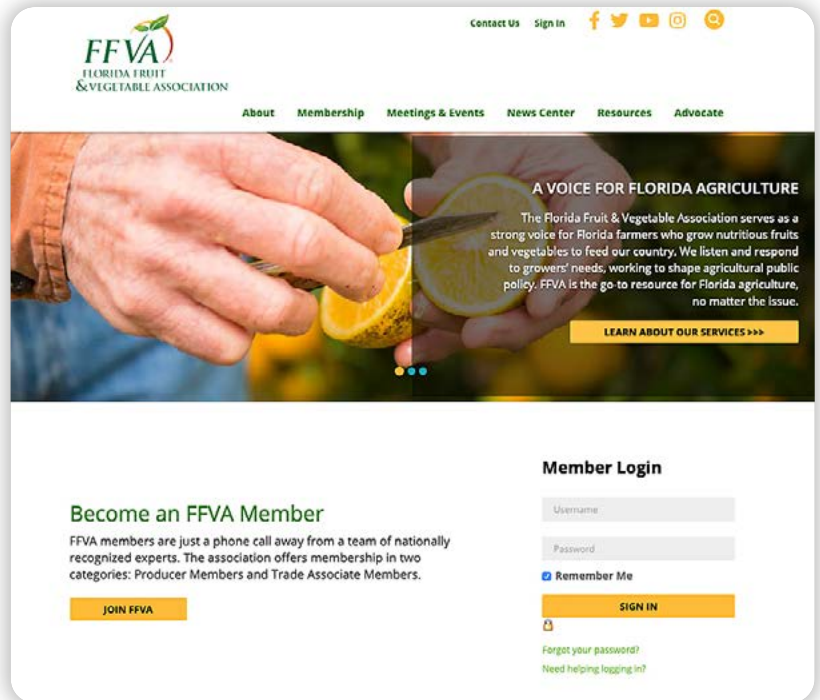
By **Eric Greenhow**
Optimum Equity Partners

An integral part of running a successful organization is continually staying informed with relevant, up-to-date information that can be used to make important daily decisions. Thanks to Alyssa List, FFVA’s outgoing communications manager, vital information, news and resources pertaining to the agriculture industry are shared on a routine basis to the association’s members, the media and the general public.

This communications effort is accomplished through FFVA’s numerous publications, including the website, the various newsletters (*FFVA Voice*, *Capitol Voice* and *Today’s Headlines*) and bulletins, the app, and of course,

social media accounts. Interestingly, the association has more than 11,960 social media followers combined between Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube!

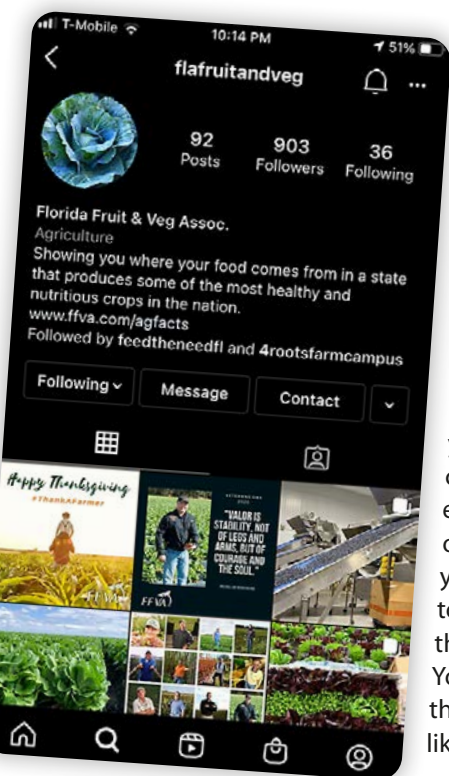
A neat feature of the website that could be particularly helpful is a page that allows you to enter your zip code and find your federal and state elected officials in the event you want to reach out to them about an issue that is important to you. You can “check mark” the officials that you’d like to email, draft one



simple message, click “send” and your email is easily sent to each of the desired officials.

Other convenient communications tools are the member portal on the website, giving you access to the full list of FFVA members should you be in need of a product or service; the app for your smart phone, allowing you to navigate the annual conference agenda, for instance; and the newsletters, packed with current articles that are sent to your email on a frequent basis.

If you’re not getting the amount or quality of information you need to keep your organization up to speed on agriculture issues, be sure to reach out to FFVA on whatever method of communication you prefer and start becoming more “in the know” today!





Labor continues to be top issue in Florida ag



By **Michelle Hayes**
Corteva Agriscience

Policies affecting labor remain one of Florida agriculture's most challenging issues. Mike Carlton, Director of Labor Relations, briefed ELDP Class 10 on the current labor situation regarding recent legislative changes and the implications we might expect with a change in administration. Two changes that have recently been announced are the increase in filing fees for H-2A workers and freezing the Adverse Effect Wage Rate.

Recently, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services attempted to enact

a 527 percent increase in filing fees. However, there has been ongoing litigation around these changes and implementation of the rule has been stopped at this time. Farmers currently can apply for H-2A labor and should expect to pay the old filing fees.

The Adverse Effect Wage Rate, which is currently \$11.71 in Florida, is the minimum per hour employers must pay H-2A labor. Although the stalled, bipartisan Farm Workforce Modernization Act would also address H-2A wages, the Department of Labor has a new rule that will freeze the AEWR until 2022. In 2023, a new index will be used to evaluate the wage, and it will have a cap in order to avoid large



fluctuations between years.

Finally, with an impending change in administration, growers can expect to see a difference in approach on farm labor. The Biden administration issued a statement during its campaign focusing on farm worker protection and pathways to citizenship. However, Biden has expressed support for the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which will expand the H-2A program.

Relief from transportation restrictions and COVID-19 impacts

From the timely delivery of produce to the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), FFVA plays a major role in protecting Florida growers and their crops. Tori Rumenik, FFVA's commodity services & supply chain manager, discussed the Hours of Service petition and the importance of requesting change from our congressional leaders. FFVA leadership brought

together supporters of the Hours of Service petition, visited with members of Congress in D.C. and filed a formal petition to modify HOS. The petition was considered by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration when proposing modifications to the HOS rules, and the final HOS rule provides necessary flexibility for transporting fresh produce as a result of this work. The biggest benefits were allowing for more of a split for the sleeper berth exception to include an option of 7/3 instead of only 8/2 and 10/0 and beneficially modifying the 30-minute break requirement for drivers.

FFVA was also instrumental in ensuring that specialty crops in Florida were included in CFAP, as Tori mentioned, "FFVA applied for eligibility for



By **Sarah Hillard**
A. Duda & Sons

26 crops including additional funding for watermelon and blueberries with 25 of those being approved." The first round of funding has been completed with a total of \$169 million of relief funds paid to Florida growers. Of that, \$93 million was paid to specialty crops. Applications for the second round of funding were due Dec. 11.

With the continued support of FFVA, Florida growers can be assured that their interests are being represented and protected.





Why NAFTA and the USMCA hurt our state so badly



By **Shane Mart**
H&A Farms

To understand the issue, we must travel back to Dec. 8, 1993, when the North American Free Trade Agreement was signed into law. In history, we find good intentions do not always make good consequences. What was seen as a win to encourage free trade from our neighbors to the north and the south has snowballed into a dispute that threatens the future survival of the Florida produce industry.

A January 1994 article in the *American Vegetable Grower* magazine forecasted a 3 percent increase over the long-term from Mexican exports. In reality, between 2000 and 2019, Mexican produce shipments grew by triple-digit percentages, with a 31 percent average growth year-over-year. What began as a blow to the Florida tomato industry has quickly grown to effect bell peppers,



strawberries, watermelon, blueberries and other specialty crops.

Growing labor shortages and minimum wage disputes only compound Florida's plight. We find our farmers falling deeper and deeper in the hole and must continue to fight Mexico's unfair trade practices and low employee wages before that hole becomes too deep.

The NAFTA replacement, United States Mexico Canada Agreement, has offered no new protections to Florida specialty crop growers. FFVA president Mike Joyner, along with FFVA staff, has been at war with NAFTA/USMCA and continues to fight for the disadvantaged Florida farmer. Along with other groups and trade associations, FFVA continues to battle for the industry through administrative actions, developing strategies to favor domestically produced specialty crops. In fact, over the summer, FFVA

testified before U.S. trade officials and others, sharing the severe economic losses Florida growers have suffered due to unfair competition from Mexico.

The survival of the southeast produce industry depends on a solution that is effective, has bi-partisan support, and can help level the playing field. Food insecurity can quickly evolve into a matter of national security if steps are not taken to help our Florida farmers.

Editor's Note: After early action from FFVA and a request from U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, the U.S. International Trade Commission announced in October that it would initiate a Section 201 global safeguard investigation into the impact of foreign imports of blueberries on domestic farmers. The ITC also announced in December that it would begin monitoring bell pepper and strawberry imports.





State passes new law to improve Florida's water quality

Florida is a peninsula state surrounded and infused by water, so it is no wonder the state government takes water quality so seriously. From recreational activities, public and private uses, to aquaculture and agriculture, water is a part of everyone's daily life.



By **Jennifer Schaal**
Dundee Citrus Growers Association

"Agriculture and public water supply are the two largest users of fresh water," explained Kerry Kates, FFVA's director of water and natural resources, during a presentation to Class 10 of the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program last month. "It's imperative for agriculture to be at the table and have our voice heard."

In June, Governor Ron DeSantis signed Senate Bill 712 into law. Titled the Clean Waterways Act, it makes changes to current structures and provides additional oversight in several areas, including requiring the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to visit agricultural producers enrolled in the Best Management Practices program every two years – in person – to collect fertilizer application records. The fertilizer records will be compiled and provided to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for further review to ensure compliance with BMPs.

Enrolling in the BMP program is voluntary unless your land is in a Basin Management Action Plan area. When water



impairments are identified, studies are performed by DEP to determine the total maximum daily load of a given pollutant which a body of water can absorb and still remain healthy. When a TMDL is established, a BMAP is developed and the area it encompasses is referred to as a BMAP area.

Kates explained the importance of agriculture having a voice at the table and that this can be accomplished through organizations like FFVA. FFVA evaluated SB 712 and the effects the bill would have on its members, ultimately deciding to support the legislation and encouraging the governor to sign the bill into law.



Florida tomatoes: Delivering the best quality to the market



By **Kelly Smekens**
Bonduelle Fresh Americas

The Florida tomato industry has been around for nearly 150 years, and in that time, the impact in the state has seen many peaks and valleys. From the time the earliest 20 acres were planted in Alachua County in 1872, to 40,000 acres with over 6,000 farms in 1925, and rising even greater to 61,000 acres in 1989, it is sad to see that today the acreage is around 25,000, and only about 50 farms. This acreage decline can be attributed to many angles of competition, including greenhouse technology expanding in other parts of

North America, but the biggest impact has been on unfair trade and dumping from Mexican imports.

The Florida Tomato Committee and the Florida Tomato Exchange, led by Michael Schadler, are both integral organizations to the tomato industry in the state, advocating and fighting the legal battle on behalf of tomato growers to survive in these unfair conditions and continue to deliver the best quality tomato to the market.

Florida tomatoes can be found in all 50 states, as well as Canada, with 75 percent going to the food service



industry and 25 percent sold to retail grocers. Additionally, Florida tomatoes are held to one of the highest food safety standards, following the guidance of the Tomato Good Agricultural Practices standards, which were adopted by the state in July 2008. These T-GAPs ensure the safety of

Florida tomatoes to consumers through mandatory state inspections; audits for handling, production and packing; and education and training on food safety practices for workers at all levels in the tomato industry.

Show your support, and enjoy Florida tomatoes!

ELDP News

Kevin Yue (Class 5) of South Florida Water Management District now manages Big Cypress Basin's capital infrastructure program. He also has been accepted into the Leadership Collier class of 2021.





H&A Farms prepares for future



By **Morgan Stuckert**
Lipman Family Farms

As the start of blueberry season approaches, Michael Hill and Ryan Atwood of H&A Farms provided the Class 10 group with a tour of their state-of-the-art blueberry packinghouse as well as one of their 10 blueberry farms across the state.

Hill and Atwood, both FFVA ELDP alumnae themselves from Class 1 and 3 respectively, walked us through the process it takes to deliver a blueberry from field to table, highlighting newly developed mechanization for the Florida-based grower/packer/shipper.

H&A's fields in Mount Dora were being prepped as they are every season by building beds, balancing the pH levels, and measuring bark soil. However, H&A's main focus this season is on its automation techniques for harvesting. Last season, approximately two million of its 10 million

pounds were harvested by machine.

"We're currently preparing for more machine harvesting in the future," said Hill. "That's one of our greatest advantages against hand-harvested blueberries from Mexico."

Following the pickings, the snacking fruits are packed through H&A value-added lines. During our visit, Peruvian blueberries ran through the machines by the thousands, sorted for softness, then packed through various clamshell and topseal lines.

H&A's newest lines of topseal packaging offer a clean, high-quality look with a convenient peel and reseal top for retail distribution.

The containers are then boxed and labeled for food safety and traceability measures before they are stored in temperature-controlled coolers. To decrease the blueberry's internal temperature, forced air coolers have fans that pull air in, cooling the pallets from 50 to 30 degrees in approximately one hour.

With the new Florida blueberry season ahead, H&A Farms is ready to harvest with more efficiency than ever before.

