

EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

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INTRODUCTION: FFVA 101



Monterey Mushrooms: 'You have to see it'

We couldn't think of a better way to cap off Class 8's FFVA 101 session than with a visit to a mushroom farm. The oldest mushroom farm in the Southeast, Monterey Mushrooms' growing, processing and packing facility is located in Zellwood just northwest of Orlando.

Harvesting around 410,000 pounds per week, it operates 24 hours a day year-round. That's right, there isn't mushroom for downtime here. In fact, during the 44 years of the facility's existence, production has never stopped for one day. However, Hurricane Irma completely knocked out its power for a significant period. As sales manager Leslie Block explained, when you don't have power everything grinds to a halt because mushroom growth cannot be controlled. Growth is already fast enough when temperatures and CO2 levels are exactly where they should be (mushrooms double in size every day). The hurricane was a difficult challenge, but



By **Nick Wishnatzki**
Wish Farms

fortunately the operation recovered and now is fully prepared with two backup generators. Before the tour got underway, our group had many questions about the process. But as growing and harvesting manager Juan Rodriguez said, "You have to see it." He was right. Hundreds upon hundreds of giant beds of mushrooms in different stages of growth are stacked from floor to ceiling in 38-degree temperature and atmosphere-controlled growing rooms. Packing manager and all-around fun-gi Cody Talley emphasized that all good mushrooms start with a healthy and robust compost recipe, which is why they source their peat from Canada. Typically, the company tries to use as much local product as it can, but the imported peat yields the best results. Monterey has recently integrated near-infrared spectroscopy technology that analyzes compost data. This helps them continually improve their formulations to achieve the most consistent crop possible.



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Group sees 'true colors' of our leadership styles



By **Cooper Hopkins**
Hundley Farms

One of the highlights of the first session of ELDP Class 8 was the leadership presentation by Dr. Hannah Carter of the University of Florida. Because the main goal of the program is to make each of the members in the class a better leader for the future, Carter emphasized that to become better leaders we must understand ourselves.

She carried this theme throughout her presentation as she interacted with the class and got us to open up about how we would handle certain



situations. The session then shifted toward traits people expect in a good leader. Carter pointed out that there are different kinds of effective leaders,

and it is up to the individual to figure out which of his or her qualities mesh best with their company or group.

The meeting concluded with an activity called True Colors. This entailed class members filling out forms that allowed us to choose which adjectives best described us. The class then divided into four "color" groups that corresponded most with the words that we had chosen. As we met with the members in our group, we could immediately tell our similarities, not only in leadership ideas and qualities but also in our personalities as a whole.

Carter then used this to categorize our personalities and give us detailed descriptions of what she thought our character traits were. Class members were impressed and almost caught off-guard by how spot-on she was in her analysis. It was an excellent presentation and left us all with a better understanding of ourselves and the importance of being effective leaders.





Renewed hope for the future of Florida agriculture

I knew that FFVA is an organization that helps Florida farmers, but I had no idea of the extent of how diverse this organization has become. FFVA President Mike Stuart and Alan Hair, CFO, who together account for almost 56 years of experience with the organization, spoke with Class 8 to inform us about how the association has evolved into what it is today. Established in 1948, FFVA has grown to a staff of 170 employees. It has a board of directors that consists of a diverse group of 40 individuals from across Florida who represent many different types of agricultural commodities from different regions. This diversity and the staff's expertise in their fields allow FFVA to be so effective in helping our industry.



By
**Josh Griffin
Grimes**
Produce
Company

Stuart discussed the many opportunities to get involved through participation in policy committees, which need members' knowledge in their fields to tackle some of the issues that we are seeing today. It is very evident that FFVA has attracted many in the industry and continues to recruit like-minded individuals with a vast range of knowledge to help support Florida agriculture and the Florida farmer. That gives me so much hope for the future of our industry.

What surprised me the most was when Hair explained that FFVA also owns an insurance company that originally was based solely on agriculture but has since expanded to include other industries. Almost half of the revenue for the association comes directly from insurance company dividends. This allows the association to be so effective without the necessity of charging its members extremely high dues.



Conquering food safety and sustainability

Having entered into a new era of farming, food safety has become more of a priority than ever. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that more than 48 million Americans fall ill and more than 3,000 die from foodborne illnesses annually. In an era of the empowered consumer, this statistic has retailers on edge and many now require large-scale and exhaustive audits of growers nationwide.

According to Jill Dunlop, FFVA manager of food safety and sustainability, growers typically have to agree to buyer-required audits or risk the possibility of being unable to sell to major retailers. The problem for growers is that they may have to participate in multiple, duplicative audits that end up being very costly.

On sustainability, a growing number of buyers are looking at their suppliers' sustainability practices. Metrics that they are concerned with include applied water use efficiency, nitrogen use, phosphorus use, soil organic matter, and waste.



By **Tyler
Jacoby**
Highland
Precision Ag





FFVA staff specialize in key areas important to specialty crop agriculture



By **Tiffany Dale**
Florida Strawberry
Growers Association

There are so many choices of how to spend our time, how to be involved, and where to access resources in our industry. The Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association is a premiere Florida agricultural association that works diligently across industry lines and issues to provide value and resources to members.

After hearing from Director of Membership Sonia Tighe, it is evident

that there is a place for all members to become involved with FFVA. Whether members are interested in building a network, policy issues, research, philanthropic events, government, or resources and services, FFVA membership provides those opportunities. The association serves membership by staying on the front lines of industry issues, concerns and communication. The staff includes specialists in areas that are critical to agriculture, including water, labor, supply chain management, public affairs and government relations.

FFVA committees share these areas of expertise and strengthen the association. FFVA staff members oversee these committees, which stay on the

forefront of issues and topics specific to the Florida fruit and vegetable industry. The committees provide a two-way communication outlet for the latest information and help FFVA to be proactive on key issues. Members are encouraged to participate in one or more of the following committees: Advocacy, Food Safety and Sustainability, Production Management, Research, Supply Chain Management, Water and Land Use, and Workforce.

Tighe said it pays to be an FFVA member because the team, support and resources are centered on the needs of the members. For more information on becoming a member, contact Tighe or visit FFVA's website.





From marketing to mayhem: Opportunities and challenges in the supply chain

What an immersion into FFVA during the session in August. The Emerging Leader Development Program is a great way to learn about FFVA and what the association does for its members.

Mike Aerts is just one of the many who work for the members of FFVA to help educate and work with producers

for their best interests. He is the director of production and supply chain management. "Situations in supply and food chain management are getting more complicated and more frequent as the years progress," he told the group. He explained that there is a shortage of new candidates seeking employment in the supply chain industry.



By **Chris Campbell**
Lipman
Family Farms

Agriculture producers have an advantage under the Capper Volstead Act, which says farmers "may act together" to market their products. Aerts also leads FFVA's Agricultural Exchange Management Group. This group consists of different exchanges in Florida, providing grower/shippers with import-

ant information to get the most out of their crop.

Turning to the "mayhem," Aerts said that maximum residue limits on produce are getting stricter. With the advancement of technology,

detection of residues is getting very precise. Countries place certain restrictions on levels of chemicals that can be detected on the produce. If grower/shippers aren't careful, their loads of product being sent to a foreign country can be rejected.

We need to continue to be diligent and keep up to date on the changing trends and regulations that affect our industry. With the help of Aerts and the others who work very hard at FFVA, I believe there are many great years in the agriculture industry ahead for Florida farmers.

Exchanges in Florida

- Florida Green Bean Exchange
- Florida Tomato Growers' Exchange
- Quincy Tomato Growers' Exchange
- Florida Sweet Corn Exchange
 - Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida
- Florida Leafy Vegetable Exchange
- Sweet Corn Growers' Exchange
- Florida Pepper Growers' Exchange
- North Florida Growers' Exchange
- Florida Grapefruit Growers' Exchange



Agriculture today can learn from hard lessons of the past



By **Alison Sizemore**
Sizemore Farms

The final presentation of FFVA 101 began with a colorful display of the tomato varieties available at local grocery stores. Reggie Brown, former executive vice president of the Florida Tomato Exchange, had bought and brought in more than a dozen varieties, ranging from Florida plums to Canadian greenhouse varieties. With Mexican and Canadian greenhouse production on

the rise, Florida tomatoes have lost a significant portion of the market share. The demonstration was a stark visual reminder of the significant foreign competition facing the industry today.

Brown candidly shared accounts from his career, including major political battles related to dumping cases, workers' rights battles, and most recently NAFTA renegotiations. The Florida tomato industry bears the scars from decades of these challenges, but it has fought hard to remain in production and provide U.S. consumers with local products. The tenacity of the Florida tomato growers and their survival against seemingly insurmountable challenges creates a



semblance of hope for other Florida specialty crop growers.

These same issues exist across all facets of Florida agriculture. Trade, labor, food safety and sustainability are topics that are growing in significance. Florida farmers would be wise to observe the lessons of the tomato growers' decades of challenges. Perhaps a look at their history could provide a map to avoid some of the same pitfalls.



Communication is key



By **Cathleen Conley**
A. Duda & Sons

After a busy afternoon of introductions and presentations for Emerging Leader Development Program Class 8, Alyssa Badalamenti wrapped things up by discussing FFVA member engagement opportunities and the importance of communication for Florida agriculture. Badalamenti, FFVA's communications manager, elaborated on the ways FFVA engages with its members and the public.

"We all need to stay informed and on top of the issues," she said. "Communication is vital to our industry to lead to understanding among many audiences."

The primary content hub for FFVA is the association's website, FFVA.com, which includes information on membership, services, events, news, resources and more. A new feature on the website, FFVA Connect – a private online discussion forum for FFVA members – launched earlier this year.

Social media is another important tool for FFVA, and by extension Florida agriculture as a whole, particularly when engaging with the public. FFVA's communications department maintains active accounts on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, with Facebook receiving the highest engagement numbers. The key to FFVA's success on social media, Badalamenti explained, is topic variety.

In addition to the website and social media, the communications team also manages five FFVA newsletters: FFVA Voice, The Capitol Voice, Morning Headlines, New on FFVA.com, and member bulletins. The group oversees production and distribution of the *Emerging Times* newsletter, written by ELDP class members. *Emerging Times* is FFVA's most-read newsletter.

To reach an increasing number of mobile users, FFVA has launched an official FFVA smartphone app. The free app is a quick reference spot for important information and serves as a bidding platform for the FFVA Convention's annual benefit auction.

To learn more about FFVA and Florida agriculture, as well as to connect with fellow members, visit FFVA.com.





Prepare for the worst – before it happens



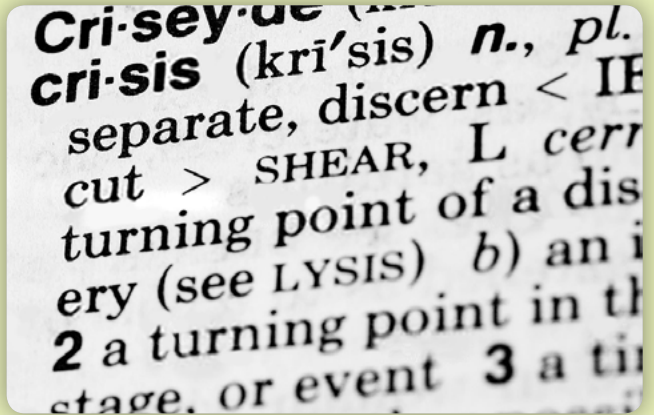
By **Zach Langford**
Syngenta Crop
Protection

Did you know that FFVA provides its producer members with media relations guidance and crisis communication counsel? Lisa Lochridge, director of public affairs, brings a wealth of experience to FFVA and its members. Lochridge's responsibilities include building public support for sound agriculture public policy, serving as a voice on behalf of the specialty crop industry in Florida, and providing counsel and messaging for media responses.

FFVA monitors industry issues and

takes a proactive approach to addressing the public with the facts. In addition to serving as a spokesperson on industry issues, Lochridge also is a reliable source of information for reporters at media outlets. FFVA also writes and distributes its own news releases and statements to address industry issues.

Another key service FFVA provides is crisis communication planning. It's key, she told our group, that companies plan and have strategies in place to communicate during a crisis. A company's goals during a crisis should be to protect public health, guard brand quality and value, and return to normal operations as soon



as possible. Lochridge advised that companies should develop a plan and assemble a team that is prepared to take action with any type of emergency. She stressed the importance of having objectives and staying on message.

As a producer member of FFVA, you have an excellent resource that can guide you through these challenges. This association is specialized in many areas that can help collaborate and provide insight and direction when you need it the most.

Class 7 member gives preview of the program



By **Jake Brown**
Tater Farms

group was able to see all of the Florida-grown products. He also mentioned how impressive the sugar cane stop was.

He also gave details about the California production trip, calling it "absolutely amazing." Johnson said that a lot of the

challenges producers face in California are similar to those we face here in Florida, with labor being a major issue.

Johnson told us how much he enjoyed this class and how much we would enjoy our time in the program, too.

Brent Johnson of FMC and ELDP Class 7 started our class off with an introduction of what we can expect from the class. He gave us some good "insider" advice, such as making sure we always wear our name tags and to ask good questions on the tours.

Johnson highlighted parts of the South Florida production trip, which he said was very interesting because the





FFVA helps growers with labor challenges through H-2A program



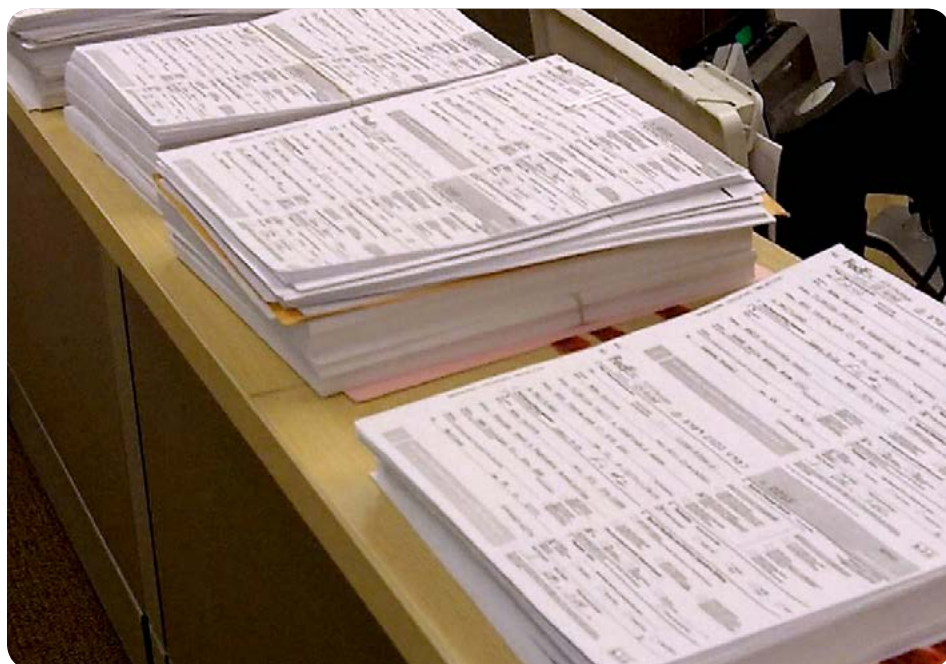
By **Brittany Hubbard**
S&L Beans

In the special crop industry, growers are facing major labor challenges that seem to worsen as the years pass. Class 8 heard from Mike Carlton, FFVA's director of labor relations, about those labor difficulties we all can relate to.

The growing labor shortage comes with a decrease in crop production. It is becoming harder for growers and farm labor contractors to find local domestic workers who are willing to do the physical field work. Even when growers can find domestic workers, the poor quality of their work makes it an even bigger problem.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security – the government agency that enforces the mandatory employment verification I-9 forms – makes the hiring process very tricky. Carlton explained that employers are not allowed to question an employee or applicant about the identification papers they supply because that is considered discrimination. But if an employer is audited and the employee information turns out to be illegal or the wrong identity, the employer is held responsible for that false information.

Given all of these problems, many Florida growers are turning to the H-2A guest-worker visa program, which brings non-immigrant foreign workers to the United States for temporary or seasonal work. Unfortunately, this program has its faults as well. Not only



is it a long process, but the employer is responsible for providing free housing, transportation to and from work to home, and travel costs including border crossing and visa fees.

With the assistance of FFVA's labor relations group, we all can educate ourselves to ensure we have all correct forms and information to make these challenges less problematic.



Foundation making a difference behind the scenes



By **Justin Newsome**
Bayer CropScience

Since 1991, the Florida Specialty Crop Foundation has benefited agriculture and the public by providing solutions to challenges facing specialty crop producers and their stakeholders. The foundation focuses on research, education, and philanthropy.

In 2018, a \$250,000 grant was awarded to the foundation to drive marketing and advertising of Florida peaches

at the retail level and promote peaches on social media. Another grant allows unmarketable but wholesome fresh produce to be distributed to people in need across the state. Although this produce wouldn't pass the eye test in the supermarket, Feeding Florida and its Farmers Feeding Florida program are able to address food insecurity in the state through these donations while focusing on supply chain management and produce donation development.

The Emerging Leader Development Program also falls under the auspices of the foundation. The yearlong program exposes participants to all facets of the industry so that they can be

future advocates for our agriculture. In addition, the Foundation provides scholarships to students annually majoring in agricultural studies. The George F. Sorn Scholarship also helps children of farmworkers realize their dream of a college education.

The Redlands Christian Migrant Association has been a longtime beneficiary of the foundation's philanthropic efforts. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, the foundation raised \$128,450 for the RCMA Hurricane Relief Fund. These funds were matched with another \$50,000 from donors in Naples.

Under Sonia Tighe's leadership, the foundation continues to make a difference in Florida agriculture.



LEADERSHIP RESEARCH EDUCATION PHILANTHROPY SUPPORT US BOARD

LEADERSHIP

Are you an up-and-coming leader who wants to be more involved in the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association? Consider the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program, administered by the Florida Specialty Crop Foundation.

Applicants must be age 25 to 40, part of an FFVA member's family or their company, and must be working in or pursuing a career in Florida specialty crop agriculture. A class of eight to 10 members is selected each year.

[Newsletters](#)

THE PROGRAM:

- Develops leaders who are prepared with a depth of knowledge of the many issues facing agriculture
- Provides young professionals with the education and tools to deal with those issues
- Engages young leaders to in FFVA and other industry organizations

The schedule includes a trip to Tallahassee to meet with legislators, seminars provided by FFVA staff members and other experts on current issues, venues to study environmental issues and water management, and visits to specialty crop production



Emerging Leadership Development Program

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Block Grant Research Projects

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Florida Citrus Packers helps ensure access, research, promotion

Peter Chaires wears many hats. He is FFVA's director of Association Services and serves as executive vice president of Florida Citrus Packers and executive director of New Varieties Development & Management Corp. Chaires presented a very interesting discussion on Florida citrus.



By **Carla Aurora de Jesus Rojas**
Southern Gardens Citrus

Because of citrus greening in the fresh Florida citrus market, production is not at the desired level to meet demand. The market moved from oversupply to short supply, and most new citrus varieties are being regulated just by the grade, Chaires said.

Chaires explained how Florida Citrus Packers focuses on promoting and encouraging the business of marketing fresh Florida citrus while cooperatively and collectively handling the common problems of its members. Florida Citrus Packers is unifying efforts of citrus producers

and members of this association in order to ensure market access, research investments, marketing and promotion campaigns, and food safety. He discussed food safety regulations and specifics on citrus diseases such as citrus canker, black spot and greening. He explained that bactericides, improved nutrition and aggressive psyllid control are being combined and used all over the world to fight these citrus diseases. Chaires also reinforced

the importance of planting varieties that are more resistant to the disease and watching abandoned plantings.

Chaires also talked about the citrus varieties Florida is producing. He explained the fresh market has a special interest in unique fruits such as Red Lina oranges. Consumers tend to like fruit with new shapes, colors and flavors.

The focus of the specialty citrus market is to look for good early quality, later maturity, flavor convenience, range of sizes, and seedless and low-seed fruit, Chaires said. This trend makes growers and packers not want to wait on extensive and traditional field trials.



With population growth, water policy evolving at a rapid pace

Water conversations continue to gain momentum state-wide, nationally and globally. Kerry Kates, FFVA's director of water and natural resources, provided ELDP Class 8



By **Juan David Castro-Anzola**
PGIM Ag Investments Company

an overview of the U.S. water rights system, Florida water law, and the ongoing challenges facing the Sunshine State's agriculture sector. Restrictions on water use continue to be placed in Florida through the Water Use Caution Areas (e.g. Tampa Bay area, Dover-Plant City area), the Central Florida Water Initiative, the North Florida Regional Water Supply Plan and the Lake Okeechobee Service Area.

Water quality also remains a key topic for agricultural producers, the public and policymakers. Several initiatives include the Numeric Nutrient Criteria, springs restoration, water quality monitoring, and the Waters of the U.S.'s new rules.

Public perception of agriculture as a major polluter of Florida's waters has been exacerbated recently with the blue-green algae blooms spreading through estuaries on both coasts of South Florida along with red tide. The situation has affected wildlife and the tourism industry. However, because ample water supply and high-quality water are vital for farming operations, most growers have been using water conservation methods to maintain healthy ecosystems for the long-term. Unfortunately, consumers do not see or hear much of what farmers do. "Agricultural interests are always having to fight for and justify their water allocations, and it is imperative for agriculture to be at the table," Kates said.

Florida's future population growth may create additional challenges over how shares of the "water pie" are divided between public users and agricultural operations. Water policies will evolve at a rapid pace, but the protection of Florida's waters should remain a top priority for all, Kates said.





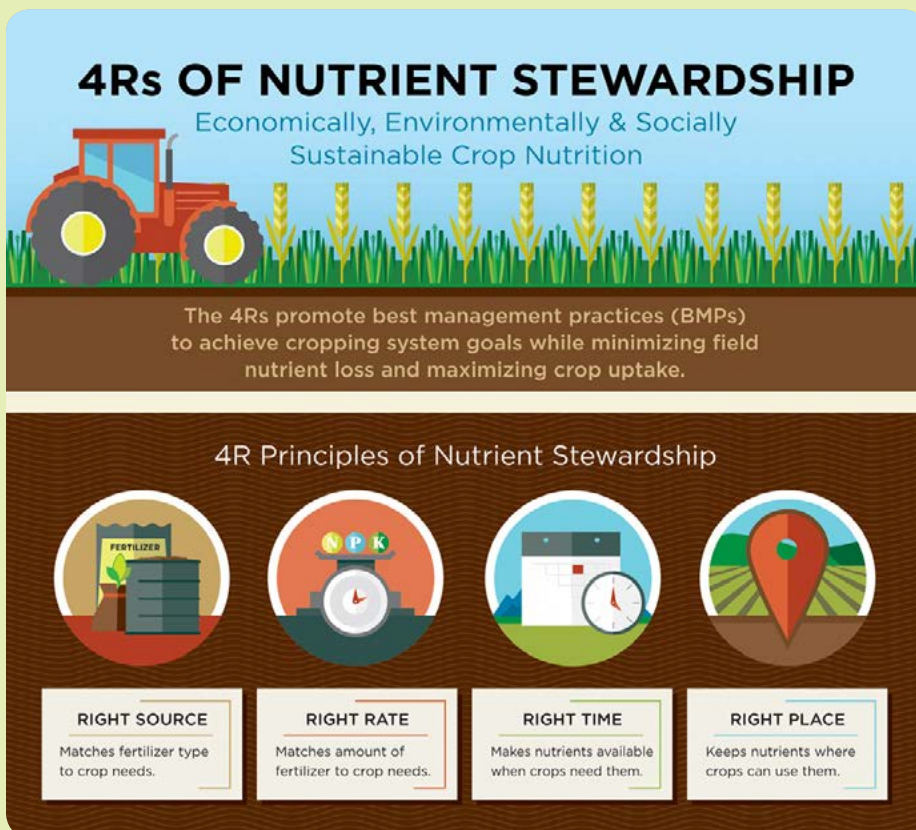
A family of innovators optimistic about the future of ag in Florida



By **Breanna Lawyer**
Corteva Agriscience

Founded in 1932, Wedgworth's is backed by over eight decades of success in Florida agriculture. "As the state's largest custom fertilizer provider, we help Florida prosper," said Joe Hodges, senior vice president and advisor for Wedgworth's. More impressively, not only does Wedgworth's have a hand in custom-blend fertilizer, the company also grows 10,000 acres of sugar cane in Palm Beach County and manages 10,000 acres of pasture across Osceola, Indian River and Okeechobee counties.

While displaying drone footage of their fertilizer plant locations, Hodges explained that each trailer is equipped with GPS and sensors that alert when they are empty. This exemplifies one of Wedgworth's brand promises, "Give our customers what they need when they need it." Growers focus on increased efficiency and yields coupled with smart input costs. Hodges said that is why the "four R's" should always be at the top of mind: right source, right



rate, right place and right time. This concept applies to both fertilizer and chemicals, allowing growers to operate more economically.

Even though the focus of discussion with Class 8 was fertilizer, Hodges reflected on the dramatic hit Florida growers suffered from Hurricane Irma: \$2.5 billion in damages to agriculture as a whole,

with a \$180 million hit to fruit and vegetables and \$760 million in damage to citrus. Still, growers continue to fight. Whether it's resetting trees or diversifying crops, producers are resilient. My favorite quote and biggest takeaway from Hodges' presentation: "We are a family of innovators optimistic about the future of agriculture in Florida."

Thanks to Wedgworth's for the dinner sponsorship during the session.



ELDP News

1 ELDP participation in FFVA continues to grow. For the 2018-2019 season, several graduates are serving in leadership positions on FFVA's policy committees. They are: **Rob Atchley (Class 1)** – vice chair of the Advocacy Committee; **Kevin Yue (Class 5)** – vice chair of the Food Safety and Sustainability Committee; **Geoff Roe (Class 3)** – vice chair of the Production Management Committee; **Elizabeth Malek (Class 1)** – chair of the Research Committee; **Ryan Atwood (Class 3)** – vice chair of the Research Committee; and **Jeff Goodale (Class 3)** – chair of the Supply Chain Management Committee. Congratulations to all of these alumni, and thank you for your leadership.



2 **Frankie Montalvo (Class 7)** and wife Alexis were married on Sept. 1 in Jupiter.

3 **Emily Buckley (Class 7)** gathered funds and contributions from the ELDP Class 8 and the program's alumni to be distributed to victims of Hurricane Michael in Blountstown in Florida's Panhandle.

4 **Jennifer Lytch (Class 1)** and her husband Adam welcomed their second daughter, Paisley Elizabeth Lytch, on Sept. 27.

