

EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

Volume 8 • Issue 3 | February 2019

SOUTH FLORIDA PRODUCTION



Class 8 members on their production tour of South Florida. This stop was at Lake Okeechobee in Belle Glade. Left to right: **Tiffany Dale**, Florida Strawberry Growers Association; **Brittany Hubbard**, S&L Beans; **Alison Sizemore**, Sizemore Farms; **Juan David Castro-Anzola**, PGIM Real Estate Finance; **Cathleen Conley**, A. Duda & Sons; **Nick Wishnatzki**, Wish Farms; **Jake Brown**, Tater Farms; **Chris Campbell**, Lipman Family Farms; **Josh Griffin**, Grimes Produce Company; **Zach Langford**, Syngenta Crop Protection; **Cooper Hopkins**, Hundley Farms; **Justin Newsome**, Bayer CropScience; **Breanna Lawyer**, Corteva Agriscience; and tour stop host **Eric Hopkins**, Hundley Farms.

Thank you to these sponsors for the South Florida production tour:



Florida's Natural Growers Foundation
(Bus)



Farm Credit of Florida and Ashley Layson
(Dinner)



Glades Formulating and Frankie Montalvo
(Dinner)



Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida
(Lunch)



Bedner Growers Inc.
(Lunch)

CONTENTS

J&J operates amid development pressure 2

A. Duda & Sons continues to build a legacy 2

Bedner's Farm Fresh Market offers education, homegrown produce 3

Lettuce powerhouse TKM Bengard continues to excel 4

Teamwork, passion evident in success of Hundley Farms..... 5

Growers working together isn't such a corny idea 6

Satisfying our sweet tooth 6

Tour of Southern Gardens Citrus shows casualties of citrus greening 7

Southern Gardens juice is worth the squeeze 8

Florida says, 'We produce rice, too!' 9

Tour sheds light on sugar processing from grinding to raw 'Sugar Mountain'... 10

Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers work together for good of the industry 11

ELDP News 12



Agriculture Division of DowDuPont™

SUSTAINING SPONSOR



J&J operates amid development pressure



By **Tiffany Dale**
Florida Strawberry
Growers Association

Farming in the Loxahatchee area is no easy task. J&J Family of Farms is no stranger to issues such as trade, consumer preferences, retailer demands, and labor. To add to those pressures, developers are building million-dollar homes adjacent to the farms in Loxahatchee. Although the challenges are many, J&J Family of Farms stays on the forefront of the industry, meeting consumer demands and navigating policy issues to compete in the market. J&J Family of Farms is a true testament of dedication to Florida

agriculture, and it was evident when Class 8 visited with Shane Rogers (ELDP Class 7) and Peter Hamburg during our Florida production trip in January.

During our tour with Rogers and Hamburg, Class 8 learned how J&J continues to operate despite the pressures of farming, especially in a high-value residential area. J&J Family of Farms began as a produce brokerage house in 1983 and now produces more than 10 varieties of bell peppers, such as the Sunny Sweet Pepper, and other produce. J&J works to ensure a high-quality product and options through specialized packaging sizes and value-added choices for its customers. Although the Florida pepper market still faces grave competition from Mexico, J&J continues to expand its options and offer a quality product. J&J Family of Farms

also has diversified as a grower agent in the Southeastern United States and procures in Mexico and Canada, allowing them to diversify their operation. As the residential area surrounding the farm continues to boom, it is my hope the neighbors recognize the gems that exist in the fields in their backyards.



A. Duda & Sons continues to build a legacy



By **Juan David**
Castro-Anzola
PGIM Real
Estate Finance

Class 8 had the unique opportunity to visit A. Duda & Sons' operation in Belle Glade. More than 90 years ago, a father and his three sons began building what is today one of the most successful and diversified agribusinesses in the United States.

The Duda brothers, as explained by assistant farm manager Sam Jones and Belle Glade farm manager

Perry Yance, were a strong team who began a small farm operation. With passion, hard work, vision, and great ambition they built an impressive agricultural enterprise with operations in Florida, California, Texas, Arizona, Georgia and Michigan. They are widely known for the production of vegetables – mainly celery, sweet corn and radishes – as well as sugar cane, citrus and sod. In addition, Duda owns The Viera Company, a large real estate company that is an integral part of their non-agricultural business.

Duda's Belle Glade farm

is located in the Everglades Agricultural Area, where the soil is rich in organic matter – optimal for the production of vegetables and sugar cane. The tour included a visit to the celery harvest operation, where Jones and Yance shared some insights into celery production and harvesting at their 1,500-acre field. According to Jones, managing an operation of this scale requires a great level of communication and coordination. The celery harvesting crew made this complex task appear to be an easy job as they cut, washed, packed, stacked,

palletized and transported the final product for warehouse distribution to customers. Although a large number of people still work during the harvest season, they also use a harvesting machine built specifically for the celery operation. More of this new technology may be used in the future to gain efficiencies in the operation and mitigate labor shortages, Jones said.

It's not every day that you find an agribusiness company such as A. Duda & Sons that continues to evolve and build a legacy in farming for future generations.

Bedner's Farm Fresh Market offers education, homegrown produce



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

Playing host to 13,000 to 15,000 visitors a year, from kindergartners to members of the Red Hat Society, Bedner's Farm Fresh Market in Boynton Beach is a unique local staple that offers field trips, private parties, U-Pick fruits and vegetables, and a fresh market with homegrown and locally sourced produce. The 80-acre property, a fraction of the estimated 1,200 acres farmed by the Bedner family in South Florida, features 35 different crops such as strawberries, peppers, cucumbers and tomatoes.

"Bedner's Farm Fresh Market has created a community connection," says Marie Bedner, operations manager. "We take great pride in being one of the few remaining family-owned



and operated farms in South Florida."

Class 8 was treated to a tractor tour of the property conducted by Bedner and David Legg, educator. The class was offered fresh corn and tomato samples before receiving an interesting produce "show and tell." Among the items showcased, like leafy greens and celery, was something new to many in attendance: purple cauliflower. Bedner

and Legg also discussed why they grow the produce they do, indicating it's all driven by consumer demands and trends.

"When you shop at Bedner's, you can be certain that you are purchasing from a safe and reliable food source," Bedner said. "Come in and give us a try. You'll come in as a customer and leave as a friend."

Visit bedners.com for more information.



Lettuce powerhouse TKM Bengard continues to excel



By **Chris Campbell Lipman**
Family Farms

Muck land, really muck land. The muck (as locals call it) is a layer of soil that was deposited from years of Lake Okeechobee draining into southern Florida. The soil provides the perfect growing condition for many crops in the Everglades Agricultural Area. One local company, TKM Bengard, started out in other muck-growing areas in Ohio and Michigan, then expanded into South Florida in the 1960s.

TKM Bengard is a partnership between the Basore family and the Bengard family in California. Together they have become the largest lettuce grower east of the Mississippi. TKM Bengard grows more than 100 million pounds of iceberg lettuce every year along with 15 different varieties of other leafy greens. In the 1990s, the company started selling bagged lettuce on the West Coast. Every five years it rotates off a piece of land to rotate crops and

maximize soil health.

TKM Bengard is known for growing an excellent crop and meeting the needs of its buyers and processors. It handles the product from planting all the way to cooling and packaging for buyers/processors (depending on how they want to receive the product). Once the product leaves the field and arrives at the cooling/packaging operation, it is vacuum-cooled to 34-35 degrees Fahrenheit. Every pallet is tagged with an eight-digit code and scanned into inventory. It is tracked until it is scanned out and headed to a buyer/processor. TKM Bengard has kept up with all the latest on food safety protocols and is Primus-certified. TKM Bengard has become a powerhouse for growing a reputable leafy green product and maintaining an excellent level of quality.



Teamwork, passion evident in success of Hundley Farms



By **Jake Brown**
Tater Farms

Hundley Farms is a fourth-generation farming operation in Belle Glade. The farm produces sweet corn, sugar cane, radishes, green beans, rice and cabbage, all of which is spread out over about 16,000 acres. This operation is successful because of hard work and teamwork, which Vice President Eric Hopkins said is key.

The sweet corn operation takes up about 10,000 acres of production. The

corn is picked mostly by automated harvesters and loaded into bulk trailers. The corn is delivered to Pioneer Growers Cooperative, where it is graded, boxed and shipped out to customers.

Hundley Farms' sugar cane production is about 5,000 acres. It is processed by the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative. The cane is rotated about every fourth cut, which makes production about a four-year process. Vegetables are rotated with the cane for one year and then the land is put back in cane.

Radishes, cabbage and green beans make up the remaining acres of the farm. Hundley Farms is one of three growers of radishes east of the Mississippi. Radishes are grown in approximately 25 days, so

they will replant right behind the harvest. Cabbage and green beans make up the remaining acres of their farm.

Hopkins said that "teamwork is important." The co-ops that are in place work well because of the concern that farmers have for each other. This teamwork is also reflected in the growers' cooperation on their crop rotation. It is not uncommon to ride through an area and see different farms represented and separated only by a ditch or a one-lane dirt road. The teamwork and respect they all have for each other is impressive.

Hundley Farms is an awesome farming operation. It is easy to see that those in the company are passionate about what they do and that they love it.





Growers working together isn't such a corny idea

As Vice President and General Manager Gene Duff guided Class 8 through the nearly 160,000-square-foot operation of Pioneer



By **Nick Wishnatzki**
Wish Farms

Growers Cooperative in Belle Glade, something stood out clearly to me: the concept of individual growers achieving financial stability and sustainability by working together. Across our industry, this is something that is far from ubiquitous. This cooperative works well for growers because it is governed by growers.

Not many people know that Florida is the largest producer of sweet corn in the nation. Pioneer's modern facility allows them to market their own product effectively and to efficiently handle all post-harvest needs (hydro cooling, processing, logistics and more). Their team easily handles between 5 million and 6 million cases of vegetables a year. Sweet corn is king here, but not too far behind are green beans, cabbage and radishes.

With their primary customers being chain stores and wholesalers, the cooperative's operations and sales staff is plugged into the ever-expanding value-added segment at the retail level. Today's on-the-go consumers would rather pick up a pre-washed, ready-to-cook bag or tray. By staying ahead of the curve and keeping a firm grasp on trends, Pioneer Growers is well-positioned to continue sustaining their growers and the cooperative for years to come.



Satisfying our sweet tooth

Sugar. It's in cookies and candy, and we frequently add it to our coffee. But many of us don't think about where it comes from. Les Baucum, sugar cane agronomist for U.S. Sugar Corporation, showed Class 8 just that.



By **Breanna Lawyer**
Corteva Agriscience

On a rainy day in Belle Glade, U.S. Sugar harvest crews maneuvered machinery through the nutrient-rich muck soil to get as much cane out of the field as Mother Nature would allow. With about 410,000 acres of sugar cane, it has rightfully earned the title of Florida's largest row crop. And U.S. Sugar is the nation's largest producer, turning out 800,000-plus tons of refined sugar each year. Despite common public perception, sugar cane really can be described as one of the most environmentally friendly crops. "There is no land use more beneficial to the soil than sugar cane," Baucum said. Minimal pesticides and fertilizer are used, with the crop harnessing much of what it needs from the "gold dirt" it grows in.

Typically planted in September, sugar cane has a 12- to 15-month growing season before the first harvest starts in October. That is followed by two more annual harvests before replanting. Before the cane is harvested, controlled burns are done to get rid of dead leaves and trash that would cause unnecessary wear to equipment and increase transportation costs.

"U.S. Sugar is the only mill that moves cane by rail," Baucum said. Transporting harvested cane by railcar cuts down field-to-mill time, allowing for higher juice quality. On top of that, the 120 miles of track cuts down on traffic and increases efficiency. With railcars averaging 40 tons per car and dumping 1,000 cars a day, the mill can receive 40,000 plus tons of cane daily.

The next time you satisfy your sweet tooth, know that Florida and U.S. Sugar play a vital role in making that possible.

Tour of Southern Gardens Citrus shows casualties of citrus greening



By **Alison Sizemore**
Sizemore Farms

From Pioneer Growers Cooperative, our bus traveled west to Southern Gardens Citrus, where Operations Vice President Jim Snively warmly hosted the group for lunch at Dunwoody Lodge. The lunch included an informative presentation by Snively describing the Southern Gardens Citrus operation. Southern Gardens includes more than 12,500 acres of citrus in the Clewiston area. The company is completely vertically integrated, including a citrus nursery, grove caretaking, fruit

harvesting and research. Snively described the aggressive research efforts as essential to success in an industry so devastated by citrus greening.

Snively also gave an informative tour of the grove. Southern Garden's citrus acreage is divided by variety: about 40 percent Hamlin and 60 percent Valencia. The group witnessed firsthand the symptoms of HLB-infected trees, as greening signs are most evident during the wintertime. Snively pointed out the pale leaves, dead limbs and premature fruit drop. The worst of the trees were located on the border of the grove – an effect of the citrus psyllid's habit of landing on the first tree it reaches.

Snively candidly recounted the history of the company's battle with citrus

greening. At one point, its policy was to remove any tree exhibiting symptoms of HLB. The spread of the disease was so aggressive that Southern Gardens was removing acres of their trees at a time. By 2014, the company realized this tactic was not having good results and it ended the tree removal program. Snively discussed other strategies to combat the effects of the disease, such as high-density plantings. "Good soil is the best defense against HLB symptoms," he said, adding that the operation now brings in thousands of pounds of compost each season. Southern Gardens has several promising solutions being developed in its research department, so hopefully the industry will start feeling relief in the coming seasons.





Southern Gardens juice is worth the squeeze



By **Justin Newsome**
Bayer CropScience

Twenty-five years ago a dream became reality as Southern Gardens citrus opened its juice processing plant in Clewiston. "Customer satisfaction and sustainability are still our core focus," said Jim Snively, vice president of operations, who directed our tour along with other plant employees.

With 56 1-million-gallon storage tanks in refrigerated warehouses, Southern Gardens has the capacity to process

about 15 million boxes of citrus annually. The grove division of the company produces 30 percent to 40 percent of the plant's operating capacity with the rest coming from other growers' operations. These various storage tanks also allow Southern Gardens to tailor a juice blend to meet a customer's exact specifications on juice color, acidity and sugar content. All of the juice produced at Southern Gardens is sold to other companies like Tropicana and Florida's Natural to help them with their inventories. Every one of the 150 truckloads of fruit that are processed each day during season at the plant undergo strict testing guidelines to make sure that the fruit is meeting industry maturity standards.

Southern Gardens is proud to be

a zero-percent-waste facility, with all parts of the orange utilized in the juicing process. Oils used in degreasers and cleaners, cattle feed from peel solids, and other drink extracts are all produced at the facility.

The juice industry is not without its challenges as citrus greening continues to present issues. The supply of oranges for juicing has driven orange juice prices up in grocery stores and demand has slowed as a result. There are also public misconceptions about the health effects of drinking orange juice on a daily basis. However, Southern Gardens continues to do its part to promote Florida orange juice and make sure that the public knows that its juice is worth the squeeze.

Florida says, ‘We produce rice, too!’



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

“The reason rice is so important is because it’s the staple food of about two-thirds of the world’s population.” That’s how Sangeeta Mukhopadhyay and Daniel Cavazos started their presentation on rice production at Florida Crystals Corporation’s headquarters in Belle Glade.

Rice is the single most important food crop in the world, providing 21 percent of the caloric needs of the world. Florida produces rice, and has many good reasons to do so.

We learned about rice production, its importance to the Everglades Agricultural Area, and we toured the only rice mill in our state, the Sem-Chi Rice Mill. This facility performs drying and milling operations. In addition to rice from Florida Crystals, it also processes rice for other local growers. About 80 percent of the rice processed is their own production and 20 percent is from other growers.

The EAA growers have many reasons



to grow rice: it uses fallow land from sugar cane crops and helps retain nutrients in the soil. Flooding during rice production helps reduce weed pressure. In addition, the rice absorbs phosphorus, improves water quality and creates a habitat for wildlife, thereby protecting endangered species.

Rice acreage has increased since 2008. Florida Crystals has most of the rice acreage in the area and incorporates rice during sugar cane fallow periods in a

very impressive operation that includes white rice, brown rice, medium-grain rice and organic long-grain rice.

Even though Florida is well-known for growing sugar cane and winter vegetables, Florida Crystals is committed to expanding their operations and investing in rice production. They are leading the way for rice growers, boosting the local economy year-round as they contribute to economic activity and create jobs.



Before the South Florida production trip, members of Class 8 collected non-perishable food items for the Redlands Christian Migrant Association early childhood education center in Belle Glade. The center’s staff is always very appreciative of the donation of food for the families they serve.



Tour sheds light on sugar processing from grinding to raw 'Sugar Mountain'



By **Zach Langford**
Syngenta Crop
Protection

The history of the sugar cane industry in Florida dates back to the 1940s. The Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative is made up of 44 growers producing on about 70,000 acres. The co-op is responsible for harvesting, processing and marketing the crop for the grower members. We had the opportunity to tour the mill and learn about the process of producing raw sugar. Senior Vice President David Goodlett gave the class background on the industry as well as an extended tour.

The mill uses the sugar grinding byproducts to create molasses for cattle feed and as fuel to run the mill. We were able to see the raw sugar at "Sugar Mountain," which was incredible to put the whole process in perspective. One thing that resonated with me was when Goodlett stated on the tour, "Sugar cane is the best crop for this area."

Our leadership class also toured the new, state-of-the-art Tellus facility next to the mill, which uses the bagasse fibers from the milling process to create plates, bowls and other foodservice products. The Tellus facility employs 80 Belle Glade residents, and the products produced are 100 percent U.S. grown and manufactured. These products are fully compostable, which is better for the



environment. This vertically integrated facility is managed by Matt Hoffman, president of Tellus. I gained a much better appreciation for the overall processing side of the sugar cane industry and how the product is processed for the end user.





Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers work together for good of the industry



By
Josh Griffin
Grimes
Produce
Company

The Capper-Volstead Act gives farmers and agricultural producers the power to market, price and sell their products through cooperative means. It allows

exchanges, like the Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida, the opportunity to form. On the final stop of our production tour, we attended an exchange meeting at which they introduced their annual budget and their plans on how to market their product collectively.

Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida consists of 22 growers and encompasses roughly 21,000 acres for its spring crop. Palm Beach County is the largest sweet corn

producing county in the world, with the peak season around mid-April to the end of May. The president of the exchange, Paul Allen, and Vice President John Scott Hundley both discussed the importance of each member of the exchange truly caring for each other as they would their own farms, families and employees. Its members don't try to beat the system. They trust each other. I did not witness a group of farmers that were in competition with each other, but did witness a group of selfless individuals willing to do their part to help each other and the sweet corn industry succeed.

In 2018, the exchange's budget had a remaining sum of \$65,000. As a group, they chose to donate that money back into the community through local charities. One of those organizations that they support, ACE, was introduced during the meeting. ACE (Athletes, Community, Education) is an organization dedicated to providing leadership programs, mentoring, scholarships, and internship opportunities to high school students. This is a testament to how the exchange truly cares for its community, its industry and its future.





ELDP News

- 1 **Dr. Elizabeth Malek (Class 1)** recently was promoted to crop protection assistant manager at Lipman Family Farms.
- 2 Grace Elizabeth Allen was born to **Jonathan Allen (Class 2)** and Andrea Scott on Nov. 13, 2018. She was 9 pounds, 8 ounces and 22.5 inches long.
- 3 Candi and **Clayton Norman (Class 4)** welcomed Brooks Norman on Dec. 21, 2018. His big brother is Beau.
- 4 **Daniel Bott (Class 4)**, production manager at Premier Citrus Management, graduated with his MBA from Florida Southern College in December.
- 5 **Kevin Yue, PE, CEP (Class 5)** has been appointed lead engineer for the South Florida Water Management District in the Big Cypress Basin.
- 6 **Emily Duda Buckley (Class 6)** was named legislative affairs director for newly elected Commissioner of Agriculture Nikki Fried.
- 7 **Jennifer Lytch (Class 1)** of Crop Vitality was interviewed along with two agronomists during an hour-long, live Feb. 4 RFD-TV broadcast. They spoke about the 4R Program, soil health, liquid fertilizers, and the importance of nutrients.

