

# EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

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## REFLECTIONS



## Class 8 takes stock on a year full of learning and travel



Class 8 of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program is wrapping up its year together. From the first introductions at the annual convention in 2018, to the legislator visits in Tallahassee, to the final trip to California's Salinas Valley, these young professionals have taken it all in and formed a strong network along the way. In this final special edition of Emerging Times, the class members reflect on some highlights of the past year and share how the program will help them as they move forward with their careers.

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## Great relationships were forged during the year



By **Jake Brown**  
Tater Farms

**T**his past year has been a great experience being a part of FFVA's ELDP Class 8. I have had the opportunity to do many different things that I possibly would not have had the opportunity to do otherwise.

I was able to visit several different farms in South Florida and see their various operations. It was an eye-opening experience for me. I was also able to go to the Capitol for several days. It was interesting to see how laws are made and all the work that goes into it. I was also able to go to California for a week. This was a great experience for me. The challenges they face and the challenges we face here in Florida have their differences, but they also have their similarities.

It was very encouraging to me, being a part of the agricultural community, the way everyone was so open and helpful everywhere we went. If any of us had a question wherever we were, it was answered with great detail. The openness that everyone had with us at every farm



we went to was absolutely amazing.

To me one of the greatest benefits from this class was the relationships that we were able to make -- not just with the people in our class, but with

FFVA members and employees as well. I would recommend this class to anyone looking to better their leadership skills in the operation they are in.



## What ELDP has meant to me

**T**his program has opened my eyes to the bigger picture that agriculture is in Florida. ELDP introduces you to different spectrums that relate to our industry. The FFVA 101 introduction was an eye-opener for what the association does for its members. The different departments tackle major issues that growers are facing from water issues, labors shortages and production concerns, all the way to inputs that could benefit growers.



By **Chris Campbell**  
Lipman Family Farms



with our "leadership legacy," and I believe that we as growers need to educate the public more about our growing practices. Don't believe everything that is on social media/news unless you have talked to a grower. Involve the next generation of farmers; the declining number of agricultural workers should be alarming to Americans. Education at the high school level needs to be ramped up.

I have recommended this program to coworkers of mine and pray that this program will help educate up-and-coming leaders in agriculture.

The production trips are a great way to bond with fellow classmates and chat about struggles and innovations that are happening in their company. Seeing the different growing regions from Florida and California was just AWESOME.

Hands down, Tallahassee was my favorite trip. I have always been skeptical of politicians, but having Mike Joyner and Butch Calhoun show us around made you want to get involved and help come up with solutions. Mike challenged us to come up

## FFVA's program is an example for others



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

**A** great life is about building unique experiences to be remembered and shared with others, and FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program has certainly been one of those great experiences. The opportunity to

be part of Class 8 has been very rewarding and simply eye-opening. Every presentation, farm tour and conversation with legislators, state officials, and agribusiness leaders in both Florida and California was delightful, insightful and exciting. Even though agriculture faces significant headwinds today, there are great opportunities in the future for this key sector of the U.S. economy.

Throughout this year, every stop was impactful as I observed a high level of commitment, cooperation, coordina-

tion and connection. The structure and breadth of the program was extremely helpful to better understand the role of FFVA, to value even more the work of our farmers, and to emphasize the need to work closely with our peers and government representatives to maintain our industry viability for the future livelihood of so many stakeholders.

I sincerely appreciate all the support given by the members of FFVA, the sponsoring companies, the leaders who welcomed us with open arms and spent time sharing insights of their farming operations and businesses in Florida and California, as well as our policy-makers in Tallahassee. I am grateful to my classmates for their involvement throughout the program and to Sonia Tighe and Alyssa Badalamenti for organizing and coordinating every meeting with such a positive attitude and energy.







# Humbled, enlightened and committed



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

**M**y career in agriculture began in 2015. I'll never forget my first farm visit to a Duda Farm Fresh Foods operation in Belle Glade. It opened my eyes to the breadth and depth of work that goes into what reaches my plate and helped cement my love for the industry. Participating in ELDP Class 8 has further broadened

my understanding and deepened my commitment to agriculture, and it has been an experience for which I will always be grateful.

To say that visits to operations in South Florida and California were humbling is an understatement. Witnessing firsthand the efforts that go into ensuring fresh produce reaches grocery store shelves – from planting and harvesting to processing and storing – was awe-inspiring. Getting a behind-the-scenes look at how agricultural issues are handled politically in Florida's capital added another layer to the exceptional education that our class received through this program.

I would be remiss if I didn't also mention the friendships and connections that the program offered. I've had the pleasure of meeting several wonderful people through the ELDP, both in my class and through our various stops, who have made lasting impacts on my life in various ways.

I really cannot say enough about how valuable and insightful I found my entire experience in the ELDP. I sincerely recommend participating in the program if given the chance. And to Sonia Tighe: There aren't enough words available to thank you properly. This experience was simply incredible.







## ELDP provides insight into all aspects of the industry



By **Tiffany Dale**  
**Florida Strawberry**  
**Growers Association**

**T**he fruit and vegetable industry is one that has always enamored me. Some of the most colorful, highest quality, healthiest and tastiest food in the entire world comes from Florida. Florida specialty crops are a global business, comprised of the most generous, smart, likeable and relatable folks you will ever meet. While there are challenges across

the board, whether it is pests, regulation, market price, marketing or politics, the Emerging Leader Development Program provides insight and experience into all of these aspects of the industry across the country.

After learning about all of the areas of expertise at the FFVA offices in Maitland, I think that is the first great example of leadership in the program. FFVA manages to successfully provide resources across the state to a variety of operations. The network that FFVA has even beyond the state is one that class members have the amazing opportunity to experience through this program. As we traveled to Tallahas-

see, South Florida and California, leaders greeted and invested in us along the way. The support of this program is second to none as generations of leaders spoke to our group and shared life advice in hopes that we invest those words into ourselves.

This program's reputation, the global specialty crop leaders we met, and the friendships and conversations we had with those in the industry are priceless. While the expectations of participants are high, Sonia Tighe ensured that our participation was well worth it. I would highly recommend this program and I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to be part of it.





## A reignited passion for agriculture

**A**griculture has been a part of my life ever since I can remember, and I knew at a young age that I wanted to spend my life working in this industry. I didn't know exactly where I would end up or what I would be doing, but I had passion and knew that eventually I would find my place.



By **Josh Griffin**  
**Grimes Produce Company**

I finally found it working in food safety and cooler operations and after 11 years in, I can say that the opportunities given to me have been a blessing and I am truly thankful. After so many years though, I found myself falling into a routine and repetitiveness that made my enthusiasm and excitement for what I was doing start to somewhat dwindle. Even though I still wanted to succeed, my passion was in idle. That is when I came across the Emerging Leader Development Program with FFVA.

In our first FFVA 101 meeting, I learned all the different issues facing Florida agriculture and all the ways that FFVA fights to better those circumstances. Our public policy trip to Tallahassee taught me all the inner workings of the state, how things get done, and who gets it done. In our production tours of both Florida and California, I had a hands-on learning experience of different crops and processes that I normally wouldn't have the opportunity to see.

The knowledge gained on each of our trips this year, the new relationships formed, and the many memories I have made with my group will be something that I will cherish for the rest of my life. I want to personally thank every sponsor, presenter, and every FFVA staff member involved in this great program. This program has exceeded all of my expectations. Being a part of this class has reignited in me a passion for agriculture that I know will last for the rest of my career.



## ELDP: Growing our future farmers

**F**FVA's Emerging Leader Development Program provided all of us in the class with the opportunity to gain unique insight into American



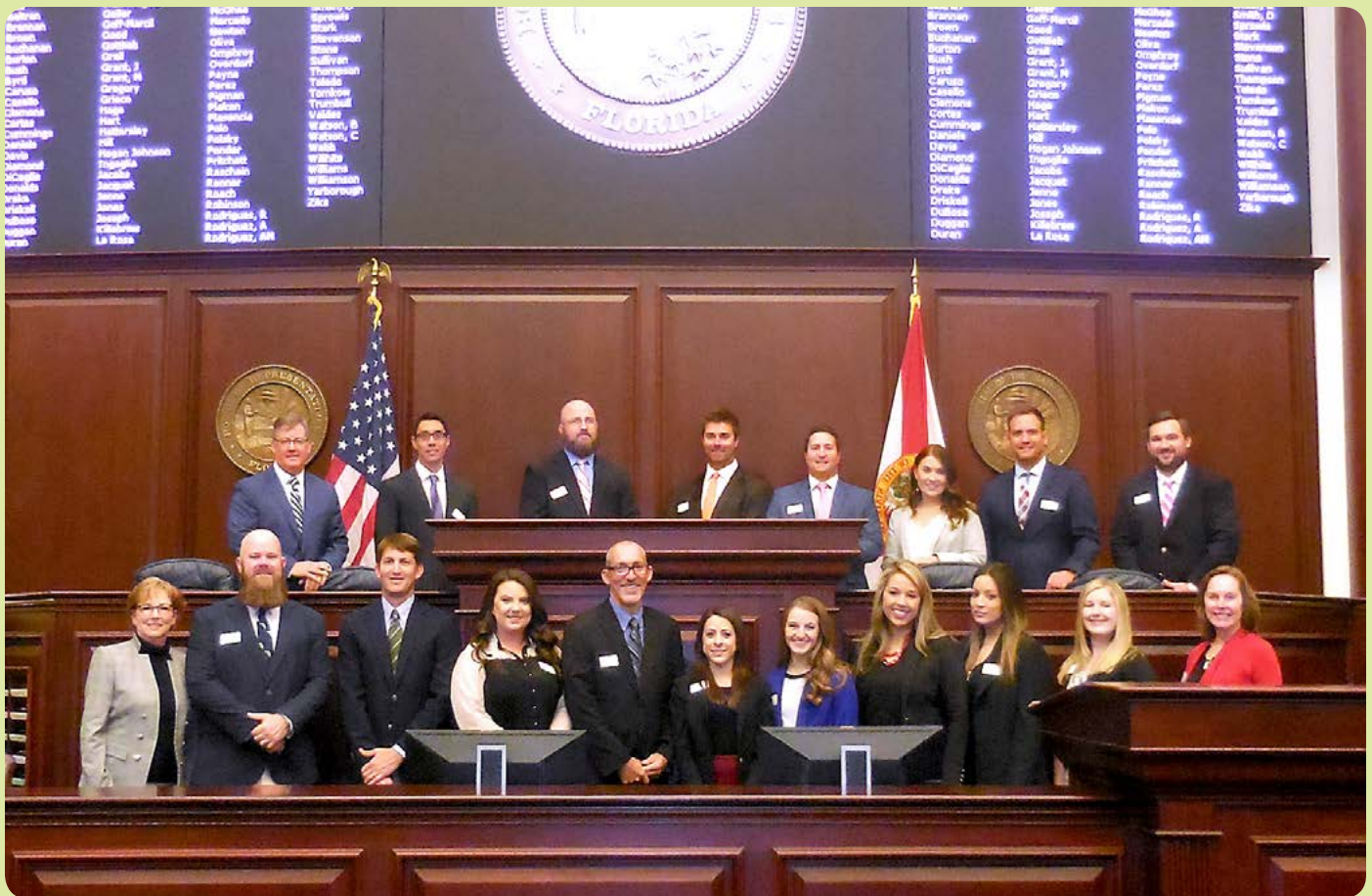
By **Cooper Hopkins**  
**Hundley Farms**

agriculture. The program took us coast to coast, where we gained access to some of the most top-notch, revered companies in the nation. Early on, it was evident that all of the class members shared the common goal of taking full advantage of the opportunities that ELDP presented. I have no doubt that Class 8 will continue to stay connected for years to come, both professionally and as good friends.

Everyone in the class learned something each and every day, which will undoubtedly make us stronger and more informed leaders within our respective companies. I know that even on the production trip in Belle Glade (my home area), I learned so many new things and went places I would have never had the opportunity to go without ELDP.

Sonia Tighe, Alyssa Badalamenti and the entire team at FFVA perfectly planned and managed our incredibly hectic schedule and made sure that we took full advantage of every stop. This program would have never been possible without all of their hard work. They deserve all the credit and thanks in the world.





## A yearlong exercise in personal growth



By **Tyler Jacoby**  
Highland Precision Ag

I have always believed that change is inevitable, but personal growth is a choice. I made the choice a year ago to engage in what has been an incredible exercise in not only deepening my expertise in agriculture but growing as a leader -- and more important, as a person. In reflecting over the past year, the most

rewarding part of the FFVA leadership program has been meeting the growers and families who work every day to feed our country.

In engaging in lengthy conversations with growers, there seemed to be a common thread -- PASSION. Agriculture is difficult, and it places many demands on growers and their families. It is constantly being encumbered by intangibles such as Mother Nature and politics. But it was obvious throughout the year that passion is the fuel that keeps growers motivated.

In addition, I found the experience

of lobbying very insightful. My greatest lesson from getting acquainted with Tallahassee was to never allow myself to become indifferent to how legislation affects the farm-to-table process. Staying abreast and engaged with agriculture policy is the greatest means of preserving the sanctity of grower autonomy, and ultimately our ability to feed America. I want to thank Sonia Tighe, Alyssa Badalamenti and all of the other ELDP Class 8 members for making this program a very special experience that I will be forever grateful for.





# A new appreciation of the services FFVA provides



By **Zach Langford**  
Syngenta Crop  
Protection

**M**y time in the Emerging Leader Development Program has been rewarding personally and professionally. It was an honor to be selected to participate in Class 8 alongside peers who are passionate about the ag industry.

I have a new appreciation for the services that FFVA provides to this industry and its membership after spending time with the FFVA staff in

Maitland and Tallahassee. The production tours were awesome! These trips were packed with industry-related stops that showcased the agronomic aspect as well as processing, packaging, marketing and the challenges that each commodity faces. Going on these production tours shows the network and relationships that FFVA has built across growers, shippers, packers and associations from Florida to California.

The friendships developed within Class 8 is a net effect generated from this leadership course. This class shares commonality in that we are all a part of Florida agriculture as well as participating in this unique opportunity that has developed friendships across

this industry. A key takeaway from this program is how important it is to get involved to tell our story about agriculture to those who are misinformed.

I appreciate FFVA and its membership for sponsoring and supporting the ELDP opportunity to allow our class as well as future classes to experience a deep dive into the ag industry. I really appreciate Sonia Tighe for organizing and managing each event to make this a meaningful experience for our class. If you're passionate about agriculture and want to get involved, the FFVA ELDP is a great opportunity to network with other ag professionals and broaden your knowledge of this great industry.







## Setting the foundation for success

**T**he ELDP is truly second to none when it comes to a hands-on, in-depth look at Florida agriculture and how FFVA plays a vital role in its success. Throughout my time



By **Breanna Lawyer**  
Corteva  
Agriscience

with Class 8, we had the opportunity to meet with Florida lawmakers, advocate for an industry we all share the same passion for, and step foot on the most progressive operations in the Southeast. While we had an idea of what we would experience throughout the year, I am confident that what we encountered surpassed those expectations.

The first week in Maitland was eye-opening in itself. We were able to listen to influential FFVA staff members who gave us a firsthand look at what the association brings to the table for Florida growers – all while meeting our classmates and gaining insight into their own operations. Our stops along the “black gold” in Belle Glade gave us a deeper look into celery harvest, sweet corn packing and U.S. Sugar, to name a few. These on-farm tours gave Class 8 a real look at the challenges and opportunities that growers face throughout the state, and they strongly correlated to those that arose during tours in California as well.

The experience, knowledge and relationships built are ones that I will never forget, and they truly equipped me with what is needed to successfully advocate for Florida agriculture. Thank you to Sonia Tighe, FFVA and industry stakeholders who make this experience possible.

## ELDP provides insights and opportunities

**T**he opportunity to participate in FFVA’s Emerging Leader Development Program was something that I had been considering for a few years. When the invitation came to be a part of Class 8, I gladly accepted the offer. It was a decision



By **Justin Newsome**

that has provided me new insights and opportunities in the agricultural field that will be invaluable in years to come.

Looking back on this past year, I never would have imagined the diversity of issues and crops that our class was exposed to. From discussing water quality issues in the Glades, to speaking with our legislators in Tallahassee to try to secure Fresh From Florida program funding, to hearing John D’Arrigo’s thoughts on labor in California, we have seen a lot. At each stop over the course of the past year, the stakeholders we visited were very eager and willing to show us their operations and the challenges they face. The issues hit home a lot more when you’re looking a farmer in the eye and he says that he doesn’t know how he is going to stay in business if something doesn’t change.

The work that FFVA is doing behind the scenes for all its members is something that we all should be proud of. I’d like to thank all the staff that took time to explain the issues to our class at our first meeting in Maitland. This truly laid the groundwork for what we would experience the rest of the year. Last but not least, thank you to Sonia Tighe, Alyssa Badalamenti, and Lisa Lochridge for putting on a fantastic program that all emerging leaders can benefit from!







## Participating in Class 8 was an honor



By **Alison Sizemore**  
Sizemore Farms

**B**eing selected as a member of Class 8 of the ELDP has truly been an honor. The experience has far exceeded my expectations for any yearlong program. It's amazing what FFVA can pack into 12 months.

The most valuable part of the program for me was visiting FFVA's headquarters and learning all that

the association has to offer. FFVA has an incredible amount of resources for its members, as well as numerous opportunities for members to get involved. With the many challenges farmers face, it's helpful to have a network of experts at your fingertips.

The ELDP offers a robust experience for its class members. From industry tours to political conversations in Tallahassee, the program will undoubtedly enrich your career and bring together a network of friends and industry professionals. Already in the past year, I have found many occasions to reach out to a fellow class member or industry

professional I met along the way to consult on an issue or ask for help. I am so thankful to have had this opportunity to learn from the program and to become a part of a network of young leaders.

Thank you to FFVA and all of those who have invested time and resources to make this program possible. It was an amazing experience that I won't forget anytime soon. I'd like to also say a special thank you to Sonia Tighe and Alyssa Badalamenti who had the enormous task of organizing all of our trips – our class so appreciated all that you did to make our trips so amazing!







## A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity



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

**B**eing part of ELDP Class 8 was an amazing honor, an unforgettable experience and a great learning opportunity.

It was a unique chance to network with peers from different areas of Florida agriculture and to share experiences and different perspectives of our industry.

I am very proud to be part of this class, which is so diverse, has so many brilliant young professionals, and has the highest number of women participants since the beginning of this program!

This past year we met with leading producers in Florida, learned about our legislative system in Tallahassee and visited huge farming operations in California.

These trips offered us wonderful

opportunities to meet with great people in this industry and to bond as a class. Our group was able to form a great friendship, and I am positive that it will last a lifetime.

One of the highlights of this program for me was to be able to meet the first female elected Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services: Nikki Fried. She may not fit the conventional model for agriculture commissioner, but she really wants our industry to see her as a partner and to be sure that she is working to enhance Florida agriculture with new ideas and a new point of view. It was a truly honor to meet someone so inspiring.

This program increased my knowledge and my passion for agriculture as well enhanced my professional life and is definitely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to



learn more about Florida agriculture. But most of all, I appreciate the opportunity to support and advocate for it.

I sincerely want to thank Dan Casper, president of Southern Gardens Citrus, who believed in me and supported me for this program. I am lucky enough to have a leader who pushes me to the best of my abilities and who is a true mentor to me.

Also, I'd like to thank all my Class 8 colleagues and especially Sonia Tighe for her dedication, time, efforts and passion for this program.

## Every young leader should have this opportunity



By **Nick Wishnatzki**  
Wish Farms

**I** had very high expectations going into the ELDP program. Every graduate I spoke to said it was one of the best professional experiences of their careers. With the bar set so high, I was certain that something on the journey was bound to disappoint. This couldn't be further from the truth. I can say

with full confidence that I hope every emerging leader in our industry could have this amazing opportunity afforded to them.

Along the way, we met with farmers, legislators and CEOs, and we learned and experienced so many incredible things. Even as a native Floridian who grew up around the industry my entire life, it absolutely floored me to see how much rich agricultural diversity our state has to offer. Seeing our industry continuing to thrive and evolve through challenges is inspiring. Florida's

ability to produce fruits and vegetables is vital to our nation's economy and national security, so I'm thankful that FFVA is here to be a voice for us. The leadership program is money well-spent, and one of the many ways that our industry is investing in the future.

Not only was I able to make invaluable connections with fellow colleagues, I've made lifelong friends. A huge thank you is in order to Sonia Tighe, Alyssa Badalamenti and the rest of the FFVA team who made this program such a success!

