

EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

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SOUTH FLORIDA PRODUCTION



Members of ELDP Class 9 were joined by leadership programs from Western Growers and United Fresh Produce Association on their South Florida production tour. Grower's Management hosted the group at one of its Belle Glade fields. Front row, left to right: **Taylor Sewell, Jeffrey Hancock, Tim Cuellar, Luke Davis,** Tori Rumenik, Alyssa List. Middle row: Cory Lunde, Paul Orsenigo, J.P. LaBrucherie, Sonia Tighe, Nathan Bender. Back row: **Ethan Basore, Tony Kalogridis, Perry Mason, Johnny Lunsford, Jay Johnston, Anthony Cannon, Kim Burman.**

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



Florida's Natural Growers Foundation
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Farm Credit of Florida and Ashley Layson
(Dinner)



Glades Formulating and Frankie Montalvo
(Dinner)



Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida
(Lunch)

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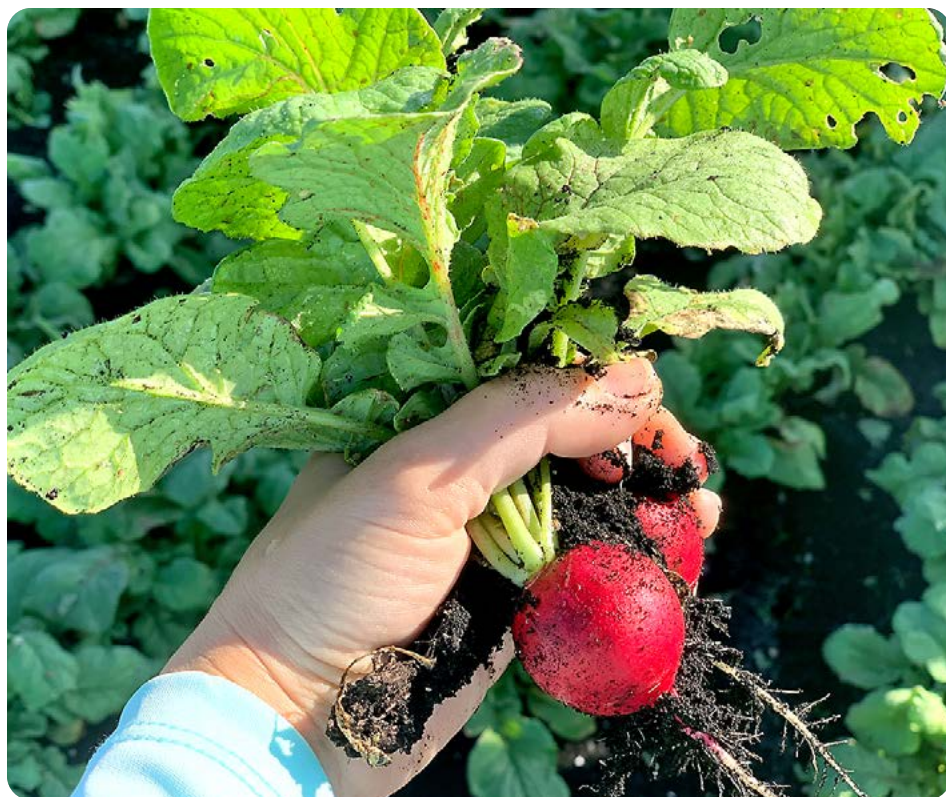
Hundley Farms highlights radish production for Class 9



By **Anthony Cannon**
Syngenta Seeds

Eric Hopkins with Hundley Farms gave ELDP Class 9 an overview of what it's like to farm in the muck soil of South Florida. Hundley Farms was established in 1969 in Belle Glade. The company specializes in sugarcane and vegetable production.

Class 9 enjoyed a field tour of Hundley's radish production operation. Radish is direct-seeded at a rate of 400,000 seeds per acre. Radishes are planted and harvested in just 30 days. Hundley Farms uses a seep irrigation method to irrigate fields from canals. Pump systems raise and lower the water table. The muck soil then acts as a sponge and draws up moisture needed



for the crop from below the surface.

Hundley mechanically harvests its radish fields using tried-and-true combines. Harvesting radishes using a combine takes a skillful operator because the operator ensures that the radish plant is cut at the right level to preserve the radish but not leave too much of the stalk attached. We learned that maintaining the muck soil is vital to future crop production in the Glades. Flooding their fields and rotating with rice crops allow Belle Glade growers to preserve the muck, add nutrients back to the soil for the next crop and maintain weed control. After touring an operation like Hundley Farms, one could say that there is a little more to farming than "just digging a hole and dropping a seed in."



Did you drink your orange juice this morning?



By **Kim Burman**
Glades Crop Care

Class 9 gained insight about the current environment of Florida's citrus industry from Jim Snively, vice president at Southern Gardens Citrus. He provided eye-opening statistics relative to recent challenges including hurricanes, citrus greening and decreased juice consumption.

The current state average for production per acre is 150 to 200 boxes, which is nearly half of what it was before greening struck the industry. In the 1990s, annual orange juice consumption in the United States was 6 gallons per person. Today, it stands at 1.7 gallons. Polling our own group, we saw that the majority did not start the day with a glass of OJ.

With a robust operation of 12,500 acres of groves with 1.8 million trees, Southern Gardens Citrus is an industry leader that has dynamically adapted to move forward in the context of current challenges. Snively explained the correlations between high inventory, low consumption, long-term contracts



and low prices.

"You cannot save your way into prosperity," he said, so efforts focus on maximizing production. This includes variable rate applications, higher-density plantings and advanced production systems.

Southern Gardens is engaged heavily in citrus research and collaboration with universities and government agencies to develop targeted delivery systems and greening resistance. Today, 50% of Southern Gardens' trees are 5 years old or less. Their nursery produces 250,000 trees per year and promises a strong future for citrus. I have started most days since our time with Snively with a glass of OJ, and I'm willing to bet others in Class 9 have, too.



Seeing sweet corn packing up-close



By **Jeffrey Hancock**
Peace River Packing

After a brief stop at Redlands Christian Migrant Association to drop off food donations, ELDP Class 9 and our counterparts from Western Growers stopped at the R.C. Hatton packinghouse for a tour of its sweet corn and green bean packing operations.

Our tour guide, Ismael Cenicerros, took us into the production area where they were in the process of packing white corn for a retailer. The process involves a machine trimming off both ends of the ear, a husker ma-



chine stripping off the husks, workers placing four cobs in each tray pack, a machine heat-sealing the corn in clear plastic, and a final hand-label application.

Cenicerros explained that they pack

two types of packaging: a black film for uncut corn and white for cut. He also mentioned that the complete film is intended to be microwavable and is a very popular product: They produce 2,000 trays a day.

Pioneer Growers: Fresh produce by cooperation



By **Luke Davis**
Southern
Gardens Citrus

Growers working together to achieve economic prosperity is one of the more amazing aspects of the agriculture industry and makes this business unique when compared to other industries.

During our South Florida production trip, Class 9 was given the grand tour of Pioneer Growers Cooperative's state-of-the-art packing

facility in Belle Glade. Pioneer Growers began its long history when a group of local farmers wanted to establish a cooperative to help market their crops. They are now one of the largest sweet corn distributors in the industry. As General Manager Stewart

Mann and local grower and ELDP alum Cooper Hopkins guided our group through the facility, we were able to witness the entire post-harvest process.

Although Pioneer Growers is known mainly for its sweet corn, it also is a major

supplier of green beans, radishes, cabbage and leafy greens. Through partnerships with other organizations throughout the country, they can supply different regions all over the world with fresh produce. Some of the produce that runs through the facility is harvested and shipped in the same day, while other products are stored in hydrocoolers and shipped a day or two later to ensure freshness. As a grower-owned cooperative, Pioneer Growers has the constant supply to keep up with the ever-growing demand for Fresh From Florida produce.



Grower's Management puts strong emphasis on food safety



By **Tim Cuellar**
Duda Ranches

Grower's Management Inc. has been in production since 2000 and is owned and operated by Paul Orsenigo and David Basore. The tour was led by Orsenigo, who has been a longtime supporter of the ELDP program and was very eager to show Class 9 his operation.

Grower's Management grows and packs a wide variety of lettuce and leafy vegetables. During the tour, we saw the mechanical harvest of baby spinach. We were able to



see the spinach being harvested, wrapped and labeled, then loaded into a refrigerated truck.

Most of Grower's Management produce is taken to Belle Glade. There, it is cooled and shipped to the Northeast to another family operation, where it is washed and distributed. Orsenigo stressed the importance of food safety, adding that there has been a significant shift in their operation in the past

five to eight years. The driver of that change has been the increase in food safety regulations. Everything Grower's Management does from an operational standpoint revolves around food safety, Orsenigo said.



AGRICULTURAL CENTER OF EXCELLENCE



Rice has become big business for Florida Crystals



By **Tony Kalogridis**
H&A Farms

Rice is a true cash crop, according to Daniel Cavazos, director of rice farming for Florida Crystals and ELDP alum. Typically, rice has just been thought of as a beneficial rotational crop for sugarcane, which it is. But with 24,000 acres of production and a rice mill to match, it has become a big business for Florida Crystals.

Rice production in the Glades is an

important piece of the environmental rotation because it is a low-cost, low-input crop that requires only limited quantities of fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. Flooding is an important step of the rice production process; the practice limits erosion, lowers soil pH, controls noxious pests and improves nutrient availability. Rice has the ability to extract local phosphorus from the water system. Best Management Practices in the Everglades Agricultural Area require a minimum reduction of 25%, but through this process they are able to eliminate 40% to 45%.

Rice consumption is increasing be-



cause of consumers' search for healthier food products. Rice is a low-calorie, gluten-free, non-GMO, locally farmed and produced, vegan, allergy-free and often organic product.

In an era where diversification in agriculture companies has become more important for long-term sustainability, Florida Crystals has succeeded.

Exchange unites to promote sweet corn



By **Ethan Basore**
TKM Bengard

Class 9 had the opportunity to sit in on a meeting with the Florida Sweet Corn Exchange. The exchange is a group of Florida farmers who get together to market Florida sweet corn. Instead of an individual grower spending huge amounts of money and time, they band together to sell and promote Florida sweet corn. The class was introduced to the exchange members by President Paul Allen and he pointed out to the class the past ELDP graduates who are members of the exchange. He then went on to explain to us the importance of leadership and how it is our time to step up and get involved.

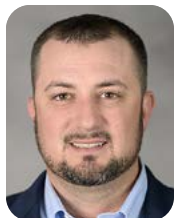
The purpose of this particular meeting was marketing and promotional activities. The exchange is targeting more of an online audience now. It has stepped up its Facebook and other social media activity. The exchange is also a big supporter of the Sweet Corn Fiesta, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. The exchange supports the Fiesta and in return the Fiesta promotes Florida sweet corn and other Fresh From Florida crops.

We appreciate the exchange inviting our ELDP class as well as the Western Growers leadership class to its meeting and luncheon.





Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative perseveres through innovation



By **Johnny Lunsford**
L&M Farms

Two days into the ELDP Class 9 South Florida trip, we made our way to Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida, where David Goodlett guided us on a tour of its impressive sugar cane mill.

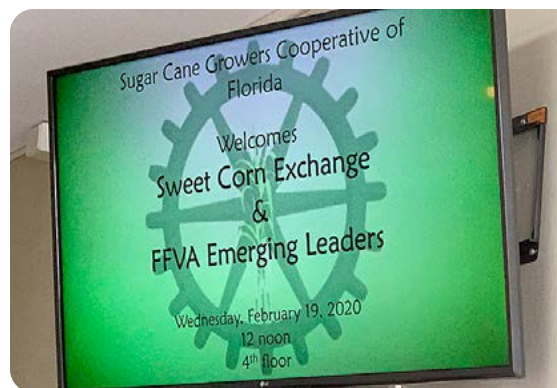
One of the largest mills in the world, this 24-hour operation has a goal of grinding 26,000 tons of

sugarcane per day between October and March every year. With 44 grower members and over 70,000 acres, they fill the yard night after night with full, checked and weighed trailers. Each trailer is marked with that grower's crop so there are no mistakes in the process.

Not as sweet as it sounds, running more than 120 trailers back and forth from the field does have its drawbacks. With over \$35,000 in traffic fines each season and hefty tire bills, Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative perseveres through sugarcane innovation. Tellus, a revolutionary

company, uses the fibrous remnant of the sugarcane stalk known as bagasse to manufacture plates, bowls and food containers that I'm confident we will see on our local store shelves very soon.

The bagasse also is used to power much of mill. Seeing what this creative company is doing with a sugarcane byproduct shows its determination to lead as an environmentally conscious sugarcane processor. The puns are endless, but the steps the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative is taking to protect our sensitive Florida ecosystems are just the sugar on top.





Duda produces highest-quality celery for retail, foodservice



By **Jay Johnston**
Deseret Farms of Ruskin

During our trip to the Everglades Agricultural Area, we had the opportunity to tour A. Duda & Sons' field operations. General Manager Sam Jones was our guide for the tour, which covered thousands of acres. The company started in Central Florida more than 90 years ago and has evolved into a very diversified agribusiness in multiple states.

This location grows thousands of acres of celery, radishes, sweet corn and lettuce. The class toured the celery operation. On a typical day, each harvest crew covers three acres, field packing about 3,200 cartons. Each crew consists of about 40 people. At the peak of harvest, there will be

five crews out each day. It is easy to see the pride the employees take in their work, making sure they put the highest-quality product on retail shelves and in restaurants. They also grow celery for processing to be used in soups and for juice. That product is harvested mechanically.

Duda's Dandy brand is known

nationwide, and it is easy to see why. From multiple quality reports daily to production crews staying on top of nutrition and pest pressure, Duda has been able to maintain a pack-out rate of 98% on celery all season. Whether the company is growing in Florida, Michigan or California, the high quality remains the same.





Advice: Find a mentor and keep talking



By **Kim Burman**
Glades Crop Care

During our South Florida production tour, ELDP Class 9 joined with Class 26 of the United Fresh Produce Association's Industry Leadership Program and Western Growers' Future Volunteer Leaders Program for an industry panel discussion over lunch.

The panel was led by FFVA President Mike Joyner and Tom Stenzel, president and CEO of United Fresh. As we know, FFVA represents Florida's grower-ship-per community and has a board of directors of 45 members. United Fresh is a vertically integrated association representing the industry's continuum



Joyner and Stenzel

from the grower to retail in the United States and Canada. This geographically broad and international membership, with 42 members on its board, offers a different perspective.

These diverse groups engaged in a robust conversation about current issues facing agriculture today. Joyner identified three primary topics that

"keep us up at night:" labor, trade and water. Stenzel added the topic of food safety, marveling that we offer "the healthiest products anyone can eat, yet people are scared of them." The discussion expanded to include wages, foodborne illness outbreaks, consumption, public perception, collaboration and the future. Members of each group shared experiences and listened as new perspectives opened our eyes.

Joyner encouraged future leaders to find a mentor. Although the two groups represent a different membership and sometimes differing opinions, they respectfully agree in wanting a healthy industry for everyone. It's important that we continue to talk and to listen. This was an incredible opportunity to interact, stimulate thought and learn from current and upcoming industry leaders representing the span of North America.

Lettuce stop highlights importance of H-2A

TKM Bengard Farms was formed in 1996 and is managed by six Basore brothers: Tom, Brian, Toby, Kevin, Michael and Stephen. TKM grows on roughly 7,500 acres



By **Anthony Cannon**
Syngenta Seeds

in the Belle Glade area. TKM produces in conjunction with other operations in the area. Crop rotation and soil preservation are vital to the life of any Belle Glade operation, so seeing these growers work in partnerships with one another to rotate crops on each other's land was very commendable.

Ethan Basore gave Class 9 a quick and safe view of TKM Bengard Farms' lettuce production. The lettuce is harvested with all stainless-steel equipment to ensure a safe and clean product from field to table. Harvesting takes properly trained and skilled workers who consistently

choose the right lettuce each time to avoid quality issues. It was interesting to see how quickly a head of lettuce was cut, wrapped, boxed and loaded on a cooler truck for transport in just a matter of minutes. Having an up-close look at these types of operations gives you an appreciation and respect for H-2A contract workers and the importance of these employees in our state today.



TKM packinghouse an example of precision



By **Perry Mason**
Maury L. Carter
& Associates

I've visited several packinghouses in my life, but TKM's site offered a much different experience. As we approached the building, I first noticed the bustling activity. To my surprise, Michael Johnson (our tour guide and part of the TKM family) referred to this as a "slow day." I was shocked, as I can't begin to imagine a busy one. I also noted the high level of detail involved in each singular movement throughout the packing process, particularly: the tag system, which color coordinates all packaging, the constant maintenance of a 37-degree temperature, and the transference of that temperature to their delivery trucks.

Aside from contributing to TKM's reputable quality, each of these conditions allows for the provision of customer-requested "cut-to-cool" sheets, an outline of the time/process from when the product is cut to the time it is cooled. As Johnson explained all of this, it occurred to me that the number of hoops farmers must jump through in order to feed the world is unlike any other industry. My main takeaway from the tour of the TKM packinghouse is how adaptive farmers have become when it comes to rules and legislation.



Florida agriculture is raising cane



By **Taylor Sewell**
Yara North America

Many folks are raising cane over "Big Sugar." To better understand its journey from the field to our candy bar, ELDP Class 9 met with Les Baucum and Gracelyn Byrd, agronomists with U.S. Sugar Corporation.

The U.S. Sugar Corporation grows cane on 230,000 total acres. To grow more with less, U.S. Sugar focuses on research to find new varieties that produce a high tonnage, store sucrose and have resistance to common diseases. Before planting, the field is leveled and surrounded with berms and vegetation to prevent nutrient runoff.

Fallow fields are flooded to protect the organic matter in the soil. This also prevents weeds from growing, reducing the use of herbicides that may need to be used before planting. Routine composite soil samples are taken on a regular basis and paired

with precision technology to apply nutrients only where they are needed.

Sugarcane is a perennial crop that is hand-planted and mechanically harvested for three years before it is replanted to maintain ideal yields. On average, one acre of sugarcane produces 40 tons of sugar. The cane is burned before harvest to eliminate unnecessary vegetation, making harvest more efficient.

The crop is harvested 24 hours a

day, seven days a week. The cane is then carried to elevators and placed in rail cars that carry the cane to the mill on 200 miles of railroad owned by U.S. Sugar. The mill is powered by bagasse, a byproduct of sugar production. The use of rail cars minimizes the need for tractor trailers, keeping our roads safer.

Efficient and environmentally friendly, Florida sugarcane sure is sweet!



ELDP News

- 1 Derek Orsenigo (Class 2)** and his wife, Lauren, welcomed their second daughter, Reese Serra, on March 16. She weighed 6 pounds, 14 ounces, and is 20 inches long.
- 2 Nick Wishnatzki (Class 8)** of Wish Farms announced that shipping, packing, processing and cooling operations at Wish's new warehouse are getting underway.
- 3 Elinor "Ellie" Elizabeth Kuhn** was born to **Travis Kuhn (Class 6)** and his wife, Maggie, on March 26. She weighed 8 pounds, 10 ounces and is 21 inches long.
- 4 Jennifer Lytch (Class 1)** and her husband, Adam, welcomed their third daughter, Lillian Jane, on March 5. She weighed 7 pounds, 11 ounces and is 20 inches long.

