

Emerging Leaders get a firsthand look at FFVA during second session

by Avery Sams

Members of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program met Nov. 15-17 at FFVA's Maitland office for their second session, which focused on major issues facing the industry and the work of FFVA. Activities included an overview of how the association operates, presentations from staff members and activities designed to help class members get to know themselves and each other better.

FFVA President Mike Stuart kicked off the visit by giving a history of agricultural associations followed by a detailed look at FFVA's purpose and how it functions. Dr. Hannah Carter, director of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute, helped the class members find their "true colors" by assessing everyone's unique leadership styles and how they can use them and other styles to improve their everyday communication.

The class also learned about the important issues facing Florida agriculture. FFVA staff members including Mike Carlton, Kerry Kates and Lisa Lochridge addressed the class, updating them on labor issues, water policy and communications.

The group had a chance to mingle with FFVA's executive committee over lunch and heard about communication-related research from the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education.

Other speakers included Reggie Brown, executive vice president of the Florida Tomato Exchange; Frank Giles, editor of *Florida Grower* magazine; Paul Orsenigo of Orsenigo Farms, Inc.; Sonia Tighe, executive director for the Florida Specialty Crop Foundation and ELDP program director; and Alan Hair, chief financial officer for FFVA.

The group's next session will take place in Tallahassee in February, where they will meet with lawmakers and other state officials.



The class completed its service project, "Share your Shirts for RCMA," by soliciting donations of long-sleeved shirts and sweat-shirts for parents of children who are enrolled in the Redlands Christian Migrant Association program.

Show your true colors



by Justin Roberson
Lipman Produce

Our class had the privilege of spending an afternoon with Dr. Hannah Carter from the Wedgworth Leadership Institute at our Maitland meeting. She walked us through a personality discovery exercise called "Let Your True Colors Show," where we assessed our personality strengths, categorized by the colors orange, gold, green and blue. The exercise helped us to understand more about ourselves and better relate to others. We spent time discussing how our personal styles influence communication, organization, leadership and how we interact on teams.

The exercise was eye-opening. We related very closely with many of the descriptors for each personality "color." Once we knew our color(s),



Class members listen intently during the session on labor issues presented by Mike Carlton, FFVA's director of labor relations.

we discovered traits about ourselves that we wouldn't necessarily have seen before. For example, I have an analytical personality style, but I hadn't associated it with also being theoretical, conceptual, creative and dependable. The exercise culminated with team activities and interactions. After understanding each person's personality traits, much of the team dynamics began to make sense. It was even comical at times to see how closely some members aligned to a specific personality "color."

The value of the exercise will be most important as we apply it to our day-to-day activities. As we learn to leverage our unique personality strengths and those of others, we will be able to build diverse, dynamic and powerfully effective teams.

How well do you know FFVA?



by April Roe Porter
Wm. G. Roe & Sons Inc.

To kick off our second session, FFVA President Mike Stuart spent some time explaining to our class the who, what, where, when and why of the association. His presentation included several facts that surprised us. We thought we would share them, so here's a list of Eight Things You Might Not Know About FFVA:

1 - FFVA and similar agriculture associations were founded by farmers who came together to barter their crops

and share best practices.

2 - FFVA has 170 employees under six companies. Most of these staff members are employed by FFVA Agriculture Insurance Management (AIM).

3 - In addition to membership dues, FFVA also receives funding from a variety of sources including management fees and dividends from its various subsidiaries and affiliates, management of commodity exchanges, H-2A certification services, office rent, and other miscellaneous sources.

4 - The monies generated by FFVA support members' interests by researching and advocating for issues that are important to Florida agriculture, educating the membership on these issues, and assisting its members with various registration and application processes. Additionally, FFVA represents its membership by offering a public voice for Florida agriculture.

5 - FFVA's membership is composed of 194 producer members and 165 trade associate members. These trade members include a wide range of vendors and agriculture-related companies that have a vested interest in the success of Florida's grower community.

6 - About 90 percent of FFVA's membership is located south of U.S. Highway 50, which runs from Brooksville to Cape Canaveral.

7 - The board of directors has about 40 members elected by membership districts and at large. The executive committee, and especially the board chairman, commit to several years of service to FFVA.

8 - Members are encouraged to serve on FFVA's numerous committees to help guide the association. (Note to Mr. Stuart: Our class is looking forward to participating on these committees in the coming years!)

The presentation was incredibly helpful for our class to better get to know

and understand FFVA. This session served as a good foundation for others during our time together, because we were better able to relate to the issues the speakers discussed after learning about FFVA as an organization.

Communicating about ag in a multimedia world



by Rachel Walters
Bayer CropScience

Lisa Lochridge, director of public affairs for FFVA, addressed the ELDP class while we were in Maitland for session two. Lochridge shared many aspects about communication. She encouraged all of us to stay on message when handling a crisis. A crisis is defined as an event that can disrupt a company's operation or damage a company's brand, reputation, or credibility. There are different types of crises. An immediate crisis is sudden and unexpected (e.g. weather, a workplace accident, or something violent). Emerging crises may erupt suddenly after brewing for a while (e.g. product safety or sexual harassment), and a sustained crisis is one that persists for months or years (e.g. rumors, speculation or unfounded charges).

Having a communication plan helps with all forms of crises. Lochridge stressed the importance of completing a risk assessment, which lays the foundation for a crisis communication plan. The plan is a compass to use while navigating the crisis. The philosophy of "tell it all, tell it now, and tell it fast" will also help you get your message out to the media and keep the public informed.



Positioning Florida agriculture



by Rob Atchley
A. Duda & Sons

How effective are agricultural awareness campaigns? Unraveling this topic is the challenge that Dr. Tracy Irani and her co-workers at the University of Florida's Center for Public Issues Education have taken on. Irani presented findings on the PIE Center's study of how agricultural groups currently represent themselves and, more importantly, how the public views their attempts to cultivate a positive message. Preliminary findings show that agriculture has a lot of room for improvement.

Partnering with the Ag Institute of Florida, Irani's team used two approaches to evaluate how agriculture positions itself. First, they studied online agriculture awareness campaigns. The researchers found that the only agriculture-related web pages that appeared in first-tier search engine results belonged to anti-agriculture groups. The pro-agriculture sites were mostly low-quality, and few leveraged social media. Next, the team conducted four focus groups of young opinion leaders to determine their feelings about certain pro-agriculture messages. They found these groups to be more knowledgeable about agriculture than anticipated. The focus group members in general were skeptical of things they hear. They emphasized the importance of transparency from groups presenting their messages. Although the focus groups were critical of certain messages, they understood that the organic and locally grown movements cannot feed a growing global population. It will be up to commercial agriculture to fill this role.

The research findings were positive and offer some obvious areas to improve. Improving a pro-agriculture presence on the internet is one option.

We can also see from the focus groups that although the public is skeptical, there is a desire to support agriculture if it is viewed as honest and transparent. Ultimately, it's up to all of us involved in agriculture to contribute to these efforts.



Dr. Hannah Carter's presentation had class members up and moving around as they found out their leadership styles.



Class members sorted, folded and boxed shirts and sweatshirts as part of their service project benefiting RCMA.

Discussing issues with Paul Orsenigo



by Andy Ballard
Hundley Farms

Belle Glade grower Paul Orsenigo met with the ELDP to discuss the issues of South Florida production and the growing concerns of the farmers. The main issue, which has been repeated many times this past year,

was immigration and the potential labor shortage that may occur this year because of strict laws in other states that may prevent workers from coming to South Florida. The biggest fear a farmer could have is to have crops ready to pick and no labor to pick them. Orsenigo stressed the importance of spreading the word for migrant workers and the crucial job they do to keep American agriculture running. He hopes with this message people will realize there is much more at stake than people just coming from another country to work. There are many economic consequences, and more important, the food supply that feeds us. Consumers don't realize how important a meal is until they can't get one.

Orsenigo also discussed water and how valuable it is to farmers and their crops. With an ever-growing population and recent droughts, water has become scarce at times. Even though this past October in South Florida was one of the wettest months in recent memory, he said water supply is an ever-changing variable. The importance of water conservation and the use of water are on every farmer's mind in South Florida these days. He hopes that the South Florida Water Management District focuses on improving the Stormwater Treatment Areas and will come up with a plan before deciding to take any more productive farm land out of production. He added that this will be a battle for the farmers for many years to come, and being prepared is the key to survival.

Labor: Perception vs. reality



by Adam Trott
Rabo AgriFinance

Mike Carlton, FFVA's director of labor relations, presented his perspective on the current immigration debate and its impact on labor-intensive agriculture in Florida. The session was appropriately titled "Gloom, Despair and Agony on Me." The primary takeaway was that we have a significant headwind to establishing a workable immigration policy, and we need to make our legislators aware of the situation.



The immigration debate has proven to be a unique problem for agriculture. Generally, Republicans support family-owned businesses, which comprise the majority of agriculture. However, because of the highly publicized nature of the debate, Republicans who appear soft on immigration policy risk losing support from their constituents, because the perception is that immigrants are taking American jobs.

"The H-2A guest-worker program, run by the U.S. Department of Labor, is expensive, rigid, and bureaucratic," Carlton said. Its bureaucracy prevents real time management at harvest, often delays the availability of labor until it is too late, and restricts the ability of workers to go where the work is.

With the poor economy and high unemployment rate, public outcry for stricter immigration policy is stronger than ever. Georgia and Alabama have passed strict reforms, including a mandatory E-Verify provision, which Florida Gov. Rick Scott supports. A mandatory E-Verify with no workable agricultural exception has not improved the economy or created American jobs. As a lender to agribusiness (primarily growers), the loss of labor available for harvest caused by a mandatory E-verify would affect my ability to generate loans. If the examples from Alabama and Georgia hold true, many other industry participants would also be harmed.

My emotional journey with a tomato



by Heather Banky
U.S. Sugar Corporation

I have to be honest, when we started this project I knew very little about the vegetable business other than the issues that are shared with the cane and citrus industries. FFVA's convention was my first exposure to the grand spectrum of issues.

My interest in the tomato industry was first kindled by grower Tony DiMare. We heard him speak a few

times, and I must say I have never seen anyone get so fired up about a tomato – nor could I figure out why. That led me to learn more about the industry's issues, many of which are highly emotional.

I was excited to learn that Reggie Brown, executive vice president of the Florida Tomato Exchange, was a speaker for our second session. I was hoping he could help me come to terms with my intrigue with these little red things. Brown talked about the ins and the outs of the business, his experiences, and industry challenges. He didn't hold anything back, and we all were engaged.

As an experiment, that morning Brown had bought at Publix one of every kind of tomato available. He showed us that the market is flooded with choices (this Publix had 16 to choose from) and that open borders allow products to come in without restriction. The grocery chains and distributors often help the foreign cause, largely made up of greenhouse products that gain a large chunk of the market because their labor costs are much lower. We as shoppers are unaware that we may be selling out our own country or our own Florida growers because we pick the tomato based on some emotion we may have about the way it looks.

So here we are – we have people knowingly selling out our business and people unaware that they may be doing it as well. The people who make a living producing tomatoes are forced to conform to survive. If we keep heading down this road, it is not going to be good. I am emotional, the fire is brewing, and I am ready to conduct my own "Reggie Experiment."

Let the water works begin



by Jennifer Hodges
The Andersons
Plant Nutrient Group

We were joined at our Maitland meeting by Kerry Kates, FFVA's director of water and natural resources, who discussed "Ag Water Supply and Policy."

Kates shared several key issues during his presentation, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Numeric Nutrient Criteria and updates on the three largest water management districts: St. Johns River, Southwest Florida, and South Florida. Regulating the quality of Florida's inland water bodies has been an important issue in the past few years. Kates described the issues, concerns and effects on agriculture of EPA's strict numeric nutrient criteria. It is clear why Florida should develop its own rules, he said, considering the amount of money it would cost for capital improvements to meet EPA's criteria and the extensive loss of crop land that would need to be used for construction of onsite stormwater ponds. The state Department of Environmental Protection is working on standards and promoting programs such as its Total Maximum Daily Load program and the Best Management Practices program to help meet these requirements. The industry is striving for a science-based approach on this issue.

Kates provided the latest news on the water management districts. Surprisingly, in the past few months the SJRWMD, SWFWMD and SFWMD have lost their executive directors. The SJRWMD has initiated minimum flows and levels rulemaking for several counties and announced a new agricultural team. Frost/freeze rules have been established by SWFWMD that affect frost/freeze (not annual) groundwater allocations. The rule also states that new groundwater quantities for frost/freeze within or outside of the water-use caution area cannot affect the minimum aquifer level. The SFWMD is developing a Lower East Coast Water Supply Plan to ensure that agriculture's future water requirements and allocations are represented fairly. It involves all facets of water supply planning – public supply, agriculture and the environment. Proponents of agriculture, such as FFVA and Florida Farm Bureau, are involved in the process to ensure that we are equitably represented in the document, Kates said.



Influencing opinions



by Michael Hill
Lakeshore Growers Inc.

The most recent ELDP meeting was held in November at FFVA's Maitland office. The meeting was very educational for myself as well as the rest of the ELDP class. We learned about the internal structure and workings of FFVA and how the association's efforts benefit Florida agriculture. Led by Dr. Hannah Carter of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute, the class learned more about our individual personalities, strengths and weaknesses through leadership exercises. In addition, FFVA President Mike Stuart explained how important and critical FFVA, along with other agricultural associations, are to our agricultural industry. We were informed about how every facet of FFVA plays a key role in its success; from public relations and learning how to handle the media professionally and accurately, to the everyday struggles with labor issues in Florida and across the country, as well as the environmental concerns that are at the forefront of producers' and consumers' minds in today's agricultural market. We were honored to share lunch with the Executive Committee, where we listened to a presentation about communication-related research by Dr. Tracy Irani of UF's Center for Public Issues Education. Her focus was on how to better communicate about agriculture.

Program Director Sonia Tighe gave a presentation on how to improve as leaders in our own businesses. We should be engaged, selfless leaders in our everyday work environment, she stressed, adding that our philosophy should be "share the glory, accept the blame." This point really resonated with me as well as with my classmates. She also explained that we must define our customers' needs. This can be done by understanding their business strategy and becoming a partner in those efforts. After taking in all of the invaluable leadership

ideas and procedures discussed, I am eager to include these leadership techniques into my everyday work with Lakeshore Growers. Our class took away a great deal of knowledge from this course, which in turn will aid in continuing to improve ourselves and the industry. I would like to say thank you again to all of FFVA and its members for giving me and my classmates the opportunity to be a part of this excellent program.



RCMA workers were happy to assist with the unloading of shirts donated for the "share your shirts" service project.

The importance of agricultural media



By Elizabeth Malek
Glades Crop Care, Inc.

Frank Giles, editor of *Florida Grower*, had a roundtable discussion with our leadership group. After introductions, he asked what agricultural-related issues we were experiencing. Several members of the group spoke about labor issues and illegal immigration being their greatest concerns. One of the more interesting stories shared was about a company's experience with a union's attempt to organize agricultural workers. The company would allow the union to come onto its property and address the workers. Union leaders would tell the workers that they were being treated terribly and that living conditions and pay

were bad. Yet the company provides housing for many of its workers. Their lives are actually quite nice and many find themselves indifferent to the union. This is the side of agriculture that the public needs to be aware of. While the union is advocating for safe work environment, proper pay, and other issues, ag companies are already doing this. This is where agricultural media comes into play. Not only does it provide technical information on crop production, it also serves as a platform to promote our voice and policies that help our industry.

Social media is revolutionizing our nation as well as others, Giles said. These platforms allow for people to organize, share opinions, and persuade others. This month's issue of *Florida Grower* discusses the group I Love Farmers, They Feed My Soul. They are a youth group that promotes agriculture and traditional principles of agriculture in a new way. For example, members of the agricultural industry understand the importance of our crops and how federal and state policies can drastically affect production. Asking the public whether they want to become dependent on foreign food (like oil) will change their way of thinking on issues that affect production and our industry. This is why agricultural media is so important, because it is able to educate consumers and change their opinion.

The class travels to Tallahassee to meet with legislators in February. Look for those stories in the next issue.