

EMERGING TIMES

... growing toward the future

Tallahassee trip gives young leaders a closer look at ag issues



In the Florida House Chamber, left to right: Heather Banky (ELDP); April Roe Porter (ELDP); Butch Calhoun, FFVA director of government relations; Andy Ballard (ELDP); Justin Roberson (ELDP); Jennifer Hodges (ELDP); Drew Duda, FFVA chairman; Rachel Walters (ELDP); Mike Stuart, FFVA president; Pam Fentress, FFVA Executive Committee; Michael Hill (ELDP); Paul Orsenigo, FFVA Executive Committee; Lisa Lochridge, FFVA director of public affairs; Sonia Tighe, ELDP program director; Adam Trott (ELDP); Keith Mixon, FFVA Executive Committee; Toby Basore, FFVA Executive Committee.

by Avery Sams

Members of the Emerging Leader Development Program got a firsthand look at the legislative process and Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association's activities to protect and promote Florida agriculture during a two-day session in the state Capitol.

Along with FFVA's Executive Committee, the group met with lawmakers and other state leaders to discuss issues facing agriculture and bills moving through the Legislature.

"This session was very enlightening and educational for the class, with a special opportunity to view the political process firsthand," said Sonia Tighe, the program's director. "It's very important for all of us to understand just how critical this process is to the future of Florida agriculture."

The class spent time with House Speaker Dean Cannon, Senate President Mike Haridopolos, Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam and Assistant Commissioner Mike Joyner. The class also met with Herschel Vinyard, secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection; Rep. Leonard Bemby (D-Madison); and employees of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

The next step in the yearlong program will be an April visit to the vegetable- and berry-producing areas around Hillsborough, Manatee and Polk counties. The class will visit farms that produce a wide variety of crops and hear from producers about the issues they confront. In July, the group will travel to California to tour agricultural production areas.



Opportunity knocks



by Rob Atchley
A. Duda & Sons

When I applied for the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program, my hopes were to be exposed to a variety of new experiences in Florida agriculture. The trip to Tallahassee did not disappoint. It was very eye-opening to be able to sit down and talk face-to-face with the people who shape policy in our state.

The opportunity to have dinner with Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam and Assistant Commissioner Mike Joyner was unique. The experience was a great opportunity to see people and processes that many Floridians are never exposed to.

The most interesting part of the trip was being able to see what the FFVA does on behalf of Florida growers. I am now aware of the countless hours of effort that go into attempting to steer policy in a direction that is acceptable to production agriculture in Florida. Anyone engaged in an agricultural entity in Florida owes Butch Calhoun and his staff a pat on the back for their efforts to protect our businesses and way of life.

All of these experiences have made me more appreciative of the efforts of FFVA and the opportunity to participate in the new Emerging Leader Development Program.



Adam Trott gets comfortable in the seat of a representative while touring the House Chamber.

"Our direct involvement can make a difference in Florida agriculture's future."

- Jennifer Hodges



Senate President Mike Haridopolos took time to speak with the class and the FFVA Executive Committee.

We can make a difference



by Jennifer Hodges
The Andersons
Plant Nutrient Group

We had a very enlightening trip to Tallahassee in early February. We kicked off the session by having a working lunch meeting with FFVA's Executive Committee and visiting with DEP Secretary Herschel Vinyard, who brought us up to speed on Numeric Nutrient Criteria and its status while it moved through Florida's Legislature. We had the fortunate opportunity to meet with Florida Senate President Mike Haridopolos and House Speaker Dean Cannon. We also spent time with Daniel Sleep with FDACS, who gave a presentation about Fresh from Florida and its current promotions.

One of the highlights of the trip was having dinner with Commissioner Adam Putnam and Assistant Commissioner Mike Joyner. We had great discussion and I thoroughly enjoyed visiting with them. Dr. Martha Roberts and Mary Ann Gosa with UF/IFAS gave very informative presentations to the group. Dr. Roberts discussed food safety, while Ms. Gosa touched on the importance of educating policymakers and provided an update on the UF/IFAS Extension and Research budget.

My key takeaway from this event is the importance of grassroots involvement with members of the state Legislature. We are the voice of agriculture, and it is our job to relay our views and concerns on what is important to us and our industry. Our direct involvement (i.e. letters, phone calls, face-to-face meetings) can make a difference in Florida agriculture's future.



The nuts and bolts



by Justin Roberson
Lipman Produce

Our trip to Tallahassee was my first visit to our state Capitol. I thoroughly enjoyed our time and was impressed with all that we were able to do and the people we were able to see.

The threads of politics are quite intriguing, and being able to see firsthand the role of relationships and networks with lobbyists and key government officials was an enlightening experience. I've come away with a greater understanding of the legislative process and the importance of being involved in the decisions of our government.

It was refreshing to see government leaders who understand and advocate for agriculture and yet frustrating to also see those who are misinformed and holding tightly to biased agendas.

I have a deep respect for FFVA, the work, time and energy that they put into protecting our industry, specifically through shaping state legislation. Their role is critical to agriculture as agriculture's role is critical to the state of Florida. I enjoyed being able to see a piece of how it works by being in Tallahassee.

See featured class members and what they are saying about the program:

[Click here](#)



Director of Government Relations Butch Calhoun helps class members navigate the halls in Tallahassee.

“The opportunity to spend time with FFVA’s Executive Committee and their willingness to discuss current issues was invaluable. I hope to continue to build the relationships that were formed.”

- Adam Trott

Blown away



by Adam Trott
Rabo AgriFinance

The ELDP February trip to Tallahassee blew my expectations away. The Executive Committee’s inclusion of the class in its visits with the secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, Senate president and House speaker was exceptional.

I especially enjoyed the time we were able to spend in the House chamber, where many of the laws affecting our everyday lives are debated and forwarded. It was obvious from those visits, and later at the dinner with the agriculture commissioner and deputy commissioner, that FFVA Director of Government Relations Butch Calhoun is a well-respected member of the legislative community in Tallahassee.

The opportunity to spend time with FFVA’s Executive Committee and their willingness to discuss current issues was invaluable. I hope to continue to build the relationships that were formed.

We also were fortunate enough to spend time with and learn about FDACS’ Fresh From Florida campaign, UF/IFAS’ funding for research goals, and food safety from Daniel Sleep with Fresh From Florida, the IFAS Director of Government Affairs Mary Ann Gosa, and esteemed microbiologist and former deputy agriculture commissioner Dr. Martha Roberts.



A greater appreciation



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

I left Tallahassee with an even deeper appreciation for lobbyists such as Butch Calhoun of FFVA and Mary Ann Gosa of UF/IFAS. Their ability to keep up with all the issues and continually advocate for what they are fighting for is impressive.

It seemed the politicians were generally interested to meet us and glad that we made the trip to see them. It was encouraging to know that they wanted to hear our input and urged us to continue to send feedback and our interests to them via phone calls, letters and e-mails. Personally, I have disregarded the importance of that constant contact and assumed that the politicians knew what issues and problems were important.

However, after witnessing how many meetings the politicians hold with various interest groups, it was evident that our visits and calls are fleeting and they need constant reminding of how critical certain issues are to agriculture.

I was surprised to hear how many of the programs and bills were in limbo waiting to see how the budget turned out. Much like a business, no guarantees could be made as to what each sector received until after the budget had been formalized. It was mentioned more than once that keeping the politicians distracted with passing a budget and getting re-elected seemed like a good thing this year as they weren't able to devote much attention to a bill that would require businesses to use the federal E-Verify system, which FFVA opposes.

A standout experience



by Rachel Walters
Bayer CropScience

Being born and raised in south Georgia, I grew up going to the state Capitol of Georgia with 4-H and Y-Club. After living in Florida for 12 years, I had my first opportunity to tour Florida's Capitol. The public policy trip that was organized for the Emerging Leader Development Program did not disappoint.

Members of FFVA should be aware of the caliber of the staff that our association employs. During my time in Tallahassee, I was able to see Butch Calhoun, director of government relations, in action. What a dynamic individual. He knows all of the issues that are affecting the growers in this state. He was willing to share his knowledge and insight so that the ELDP class was prepared for upcoming discussions with Herschel Vinyard, secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection; Senate President Mike Haridopolos; House Speaker Dean Cannon and Rep. Leonard Bembry. It is evident that he respects all people in Tallahassee, regardless of what party they belong to. Calhoun was great at answering our questions about any of the processes that occurred. I observed him discussing the inner workings of Tallahassee with several members of our class one-on-one.

If you haven't had an opportunity to join FFVA's executive committee on its annual trip to Tallahassee, I encourage you to participate in the future. You will be enlightened by the process and impressed by Butch Calhoun.

All of the ELDP experiences have been great. However, this one stands out the most for me. I look forward to future trips to Tallahassee.

Memorable insight



by Andy Ballard
Hundley Farms

The ELDP was Tallahassee-bound for its third session this year, and what a session it was! FFVA Director of Government Relations Butch Calhoun managed to corral some phenomenal speakers that included House Speaker Dean Cannon and Senate President Mike Haridopolos. The experience was guaranteed to be a memorable one with the fast-paced political action in Florida's capital.

After meeting with the House speaker and Senate president, I can see that they are both important agricultural advocates. We can only hope that the next round of leaders are just as passionate and dedicated to the future of agricultural growth and development. Another highlight of the session included dinner with Commissioner Adam Putnam. Mr. Putnam is a very bright and innovative leader in the industry. He is in the process of initiating a program in the public schools that will introduce locally grown produce into the daily lunch menu. This will be a first for the Department of Agriculture, which in January took over the lunch program from the Florida Department of Education. Commissioner Putnam seems to be up for the many challenges that the industry is facing, and with his passionate leadership he will surely succeed.

We rounded out our session with more impressive speakers, including Rep. Leonard Bembry, Dr. Martha Roberts, Mary Ann Gosa, and DEP Secretary Herschel Vinyard. They were all informative speakers who gave us insight to the overall function of the political process. Thanks to Butch Calhoun and his dedication to the FFVA ELDP, we were able to take away valuable information and experiences that will not be soon forgotten.



Executive privilege



by Michael Hill
Lakeshore Growers Inc.

My first trip to Florida's Capitol was very educational. I was honored to be a guest of FFVA's Executive Committee for the duration of our visit. As a group we had lunch with Herschel Vinyard, secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, during which I was relieved to hear where he stood in relation to agriculture. We were privileged to visit the House of Representatives and meet with Speaker Dean Cannon as well as Senate President Mike Haridopolos. Then it was off to meet with Daniel Sleep of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Sleep explained to our group how his program is run, and what efforts are taken to market our "Fresh From Florida" product throughout the world.

It is vital to keep probing for new markets and audiences as our competition continues to grow every season in Central and South America. To see how much Butch Calhoun does for FFVA was extremely humbling. It was an honor to share dinner with Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam and Assistant Commissioner Mike Joyner at the end of the day; it is comforting knowing that we have such hard-working and noble people working and fighting for our industry every day. That knowledge makes being a Florida blueberry farmer worth every ounce of sweat.

On the second day of our trip to Tallahassee, we were educated on the microbiological side of agriculture by Dr. Martha Roberts. She explained just how easy it is for our farms to be practicing food safety -- not just for the health and well-being of our customers, but also to allow our industry to thrive and flourish.

We then met with Mary Ann Gosa, the UF/IFAS director of government affairs. She illustrated what a vital role she plays by working with the legislators to halt bills from passing or nudge them along for passage. What resonated with me the most was how important and valuable our phone calls are to legislators. She gave us multiple examples of how the ag community must come together and make an impact with the legislators just by voicing our opinions through personal contact.

Overall, this was an excellent trip that I was honored to be a part of. I cannot thank the Executive Committee enough for having us accompany them. Thanks to Butch Calhoun for lining up all of the meetings while the House and Senate were in session; that must have been a task in itself. The class seems to really enjoy each other's company and fellowship, which I believe is a big part of this program as well. I would also like to thank Sonia Tighe for her continued dedication to the Emerging Leader Development Program and our experience with FFVA. I am truly looking forward to our next trip in April, and would like to thank all of FFVA again for the opportunity to be a part of this program.

Political pondering



by Heather Banky
U.S. Sugar Corporation

There may be a great deal about the political system that I may not agree with or fully understand, but one thing is quite clear: decisions are being made every minute that may or may not affect us. Even more frightening is the reality that if the right forces do not intervene and educate the decision-makers, we could easily end up in the ditch.

While we choose to scream from the sidelines, play armchair quarterback and



Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam joined the class for dinner.

try to guess what is going on, there are mini-militias that are in the game of strategic political warfare. Their game relies more on knowing the answer than guessing where someone stands. Their game assumes the decision-maker needs some help, and they know more than anything that the rules change as fast as the faces. Oh and by the way, the game has just as many bad guys as good.

I walk away from the Tallahassee experience understanding even more clearly the importance of a unified voice that effectively keeps us playing to win. The goal has to be greater than just survival today. This game never ends!

Dedicated to Mr. Butch, a good guy who gets it...

The next stop will be an April visit to the vegetable- and berry-producing areas around Hillsborough, Manatee and Polk counties. Look for those stories in the next issue.