

EMERGING TIMES

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Opportunity to tour ag operations is an eye-opener for young leaders



The class outside the first stop of its April production tour, SunnyRidge Farm. From left to right: Rob Atchley, Sonia Tighe, Michael Hill, Jennifer Hodges, Andy Ballard, Elizabeth Malek, Adam Trott, April Roe Porter, Rachel Walters, Amy Tadlock, Heather Banky, Justin Roberson, Keith Mixon.

by Avery Sams

The Emerging Leader Development Program recently finished its fourth session, a tour of the vegetable- and berry-producing areas around Hillsborough, Manatee and Polk counties.

The agenda was packed with visits to 14 sites in two days, and the class was nothing less than astounded, and somewhat exhausted, by the time the session was over.

"I don't think that I can put a finger on my favorite site that we visited because there were so many, and each site had their unique strengths,"

said Michael Hill. "I would just like to say thank you to the entire FFVA community for the opportunity to be a part of such a wonderful program."

The class visited a wide range of operations including packinghouses, a fertilizer supplier, a winery and fields of blueberries, tomatoes, eggplant and squash.

In July the group will travel to California to learn about and tour the agricultural production areas in Salinas and the surrounding areas.



Do you know where your fertilizer comes from?



by Andy Ballard
Hundley Farms

Our April trip included a visit to the YARA facilities in Tampa. YARA is one of the largest fertilizer suppliers in the world, and about 10 percent of the international supply moves through the Tampa port. That makes this YARA plant one of the busiest in North America. Based in Oslo, Norway, YARA specializes in agricultural products and environmental agents. The facility in Tampa handles only fertilizers. Ships bring in large amounts of anhydrous ammonia stored at 28 degrees below zero; then it is pumped into storage tanks. The tanks are always kept at least half full in case of severe weather. The plant averages four or five vessels a month, and each vessel can store up to 40,000 tons. The majority of the vessels come from Trinidad, but some come from Ukraine. The plant can pump 1,200 tons an hour from a ship. Once it is in the storage tanks, it is then pumped 40 miles away to Bartow, where it is turned into MAP and DAP fertilizers.

The YARA plant also stores CN-9, a primarily calcium solution. Trucking companies usually pick up the CN-9 solution instead of pumping it away. The CN-9 is stored the same way with different tank criteria because of the weight of the solution. Demand for calcium in the past 12 months has doubled, so production is starting to increase for CN-9. It is produced in Norway, with a vessel arriving at the plant about every month.

The plant's strict security system includes a 24-hour security guard and surveillance cameras. A high wall with barbed wire surrounds the facility. Eight people run the plant during the day and it is controlled by a program logic

controller, which will automatically close valves or shut down if there is a problem.

I enjoyed seeing this side of the agricultural process. It makes you think a little differently when you have to order fertilizer. I didn't realize the effort or manpower it took to get NPK. This experience with the ELDP was definitely an enlightening session.

DiMare explores new growing strategy



by Heather Banky
U.S. Sugar Corporation

"My tomato journey potentially gave me another leadership lesson learned - if you cannot beat them, join them, and then figure out how to beat them at their own game."

- Heather Banky

Our glimpse inside the DiMare Fresh packing facility gave me an appreciation of its focus on quality and the attention to detail that it takes to consistently meet the demands of the marketplace. However, the most impressive take-away was the greenhouse operation that is newly underway. The efficiency, technology and overall layout that included a well-thought-out expansion plan sent a powerful message. Foreign competitors should watch out; DiMare has no intention of losing the fight for the marketplace.

My tomato journey potentially gave me another leadership lesson learned - if you cannot beat them, join them, and then figure out how to beat them at their own game.



Adam Trott, Andy Ballard and Elizabeth Malek take a more hands-on approach while touring a tomato field.



Learning something new every day



by Michael Hill
Lakeshore Growers Inc.

As a grower, I found the Tampa production trip to be the most interactive and exciting trip that our Emerging Leader Development Program has been on. In two and a half days we successfully visited 14 different locations/operations across the Tampa, Plant City, Ruskin and Winter Haven area. I took a great deal of knowledge back with me, to say the least.

One of the locations that our group visited was the local Publix, where we toured the fresh produce area and spoke with the manager of the store as well as the produce manager. Something that I found interesting was that bananas are the highest-volume fruit moved year in and year out through their store.

We also visited University of Florida's Gulf Coast Research Center, where they are doing some amazing things for the tomato, pepper and strawberry producers in Florida. Dr. Natalia Perez founded SAS (Strawberry Advisory System); she informed us that one of the biggest problems strawberry growers are facing during their season is anthracnose. Growers who sign up for SAS are notified through text messages or email when temperatures favor anthracnose, picked up through their nearest FAWN (Florida Automated Weather Network) station. This is a big money-saver for the farmers, because they can spray accordingly using the SAS technology instead of having to spray continuously as a preventive measure.

Additionally, almost every facet of Florida agriculture is based on market windows, and Dr. Bielinski Santos has multiple, excellent trials with high

tunnels. His experiments show that high tunnels help decrease the disease pressure on tomatoes and peppers, as well as eliminate the use of overhead irrigation for frost protection on strawberries. It is difficult for these industries not to look hard into these experiments going forward; agriculture is all about adapting to surroundings and being innovative. With the constant increase in production prices and the decrease in market prices, we all must keep our minds open to new techniques and to implementing new practices.

I don't think that I can put a finger on my favorite site that we visited because there were so many, and each site had its unique strengths. It was amazing seeing just one of Lipman's 7,000-acre tomato farms in the middle of harvest - an experience that I will never forget.

The tour of YARA where fertilizer comes into port was eye-opening as well, and I learned a great deal. Our schedules were busy from sun up to sun down the entire trip. I believe I can speak for the entire group when I say that the Emerging Leader Development Program has been a huge success. It is difficult for me, being a grower, to see the "big" picture of Florida agriculture when I am only exposed to our farm. Through this program I have learned so much about every aspect and stage of agriculture, from the field to the packing houses and on to the grocery stores, all to eventually end with the consumers.

The individuals that I have met and the contacts that I have made are immeasurably valuable, and will greatly benefit my career and network in the future. I would just like to say thank you to the entire FFVA community for the opportunity to be a part of such a wonderful program.

State of importance



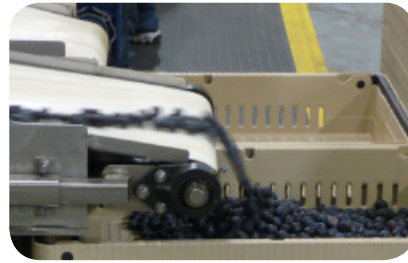
by Elizabeth Malek
Glades Crop Care, Inc.

The Florida State Farmer's Market allows ag-related businesses such as growers, shippers, packers and distributors to conduct business in an open market. Companies can rent on-site units, packing houses, coolers, truck scales, and offices in the market as temporary or permanent tenants. One of the great advantages of being a tenant in the market is that the state assists with sales and marketing. This ensures that large and small companies are equally competitive and consumers receive quality produce. The market also promotes "Fresh from Florida" produce which is vital to the economic growth of Florida's agriculture.

Working in Immokalee, I frequently drive by a state Farmer's Market. I never knew the scope or importance of the market until after our tour in Plant City. Last year the state market sold over \$225 million in vegetable and fruit commodities, and the market in Plant City profited more than \$500,000. The Farmer's Market is a win-win for agribusiness and the state.



Justin Roberson, Michael Hill and Bill Roe discuss planting, harvesting and pest management techniques utilized by Wm. G. Roe & Sons





RCMA visit is child's play



by April Roe Porter
Wm. G. Roe & Sons

On day two of our April production trip, we visited the Redlands Christian Migrant Association's Dover center. I was familiar with RCMA, having supported the organization through its annual Christmas card fundraiser. But visiting the center in person was more touching than I imagined. We spent the morning touring the facility, visiting with the center's staff and playing with the kids. It was heartwarming to see how cheerful they were and to hear from staff members that many families wouldn't have this opportunity without RCMA.

RCMA's mission is to help families solve and prevent the problems inherent in a migrant lifestyle so the children can grow up in an environment that nurtures success. RCMA's services go well beyond education and day care. Support workers help families with immigration issues, finances, health care, etc. They visit the families' homes two times a year and are on call full-time.

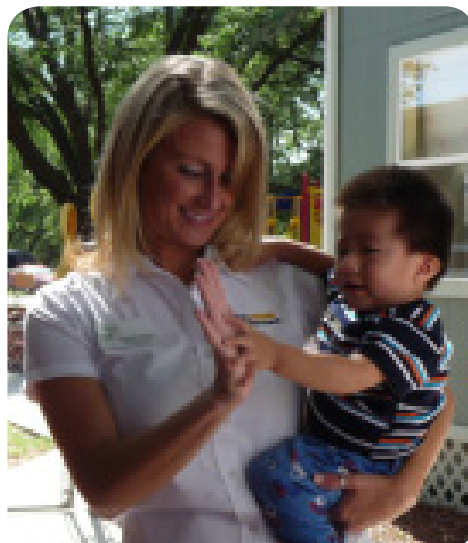
However, it's not just children whose lives are changed by RCMA – the center's staff members often have come from a migrant family or were RCMA kids themselves. A big part of RCMA's success is the ability of its staff to empathize with the families it serves.

For part of the year, the Dover center has "Strawberry Saturdays," extending its hours to six days a week so parents can take advantage of the extra day's work. RCMA's centers open and close with the rhythm of the harvest season.

During our visit, two of our class members, Michael and Justin, read books to the children. The kids were hanging on every word. The moment made a big impression on each of us. The class also

contributed books to the center's lending library.

RCMA operates and is regulated like most other day care centers. But there is more passion and certitude at RCMA. Everyone works together to improve the lives of the local migrant community, and the spirit of RCMA is contagious. The impressions from our visit will stay with us far longer than the morning we spent with the kids at RCMA.



Jennifer Hodges connects with one of the nearly 100 children at the RCMA center in Dover.

Trip begins with sunny outlook



by Jennifer Hodges
The Andersons
Plant Nutrient Group

The first stop during our April production trip was SunnyRidge Farm in Plant City. Our group had the privilege of visiting with Keith Mixon, president and CEO of SunnyRidge/Dole, and his product support coordinator, Amy Tadlock. This impressive organization is led by the three Mixon brothers: Keith, Jerry and Greg, who took over after their father, Gerald, retired. Although this organization began as a small

blueberry operation, it has grown to be a well-known brand throughout North and South America, and has expanded to include blackberries, raspberries and strawberries. The tour wound in and out of coolers and throughout the packinghouse. Keith described the strict quality-control standards as well as the close business relationships they have with their growers. It was interesting to see how the fruit is inspected and the multiple tests it undergoes to ensure a quality product. As the tour concluded, Keith and Amy sent the group home with fresh blueberries, blackberries and raspberries.

Getting a lesson in "Wish" thinking



by Elizabeth Malek
Glades Crop Care, Inc.

Wish Farms is a great example of a successful and innovative business. Family owned and operated, the company began in New York City in 1922 with a few vegetable push carts. Since then it has expanded to growing, processing, packing and shipping, and is now the largest strawberry shipper in Florida. Wish Farms also sells blueberries, tomatoes, peppers, cantaloupe, eggplant, and squash.

Not only is this company highly diversified, but it also utilizes technology. Wish Farms uses the bloom count forecasting model which was developed by the University of Florida. This allows them to predict with some accuracy what fruit production will be like three weeks later, and it helps them to organize harvesting crews, materials, and storage space.

Wish Farms also uses Fresh QC™ and How's My Picking™ which are part of their produce traceability initiative. These programs allow for comments and feedback from the consumer to go directly to the company, the grower, and even the picker, making everyone accountable. They also help Wish Farms to know which fields had higher-quality fruit and which varieties were favored by consumers.



Technology paired with time-tested practices



by Rob Atchley
A. Duda & Sons

The tour of Wm. G. Roe & Sons' facilities was definitely one of the highlights of our April agricultural production tour. It was impressive to see how the family has embraced new technology while leveraging the benefits of good old-fashioned manpower. As with most packing facilities, technology was very prevalent. It was interesting to see how the family uses machinery in its blueberry facility to control the amount of fruit put in the packages down to the individual berry.

Bill Roe explained that while the company depends on the machines to do those tasks, for many jobs there are still benefits in using people. He made an excellent point that people can change tasks with simple instruction, and they do not require expensive maintenance. You also do not have to wait for parts to repair them. This was definitely great food for thought on the ride home that day.

We were also able to tour the facility where the family bottles its Noble brand juices. The juice tasted great. I was very impressed by the use of plant plastic in so much of the juice packaging. We saw the entire bottling process and it was clear the family strives to create a brand that not only tastes great, but is packaged in a manner customers can feel good about. I arrived at the Roes' facilities expecting just another packinghouse tour. I left with some great ideas and no doubt a new juice-buying habit.

Blueberry wine from Florida a surprise



by Rachel Walters
Bayer CropScience

Have you ever heard of blueberry wine? Did you know that dry, semi-dry and sweet blueberry wines are produced in Florida? My answer to both of these questions was no. However, we had the pleasure of visiting Keel & Curley Winery during the April production trip, and I can now answer yes.

We met Clay and Ryan Keel, brothers who manage the family business in Plant City. The company began as a container nursery. Once market conditions began to change, they planted five acres of blueberries in 1997. In the early 2000s, the family began to experiment with winemaking. After partnering with a winemaker from Vermont, they launched the winery. Currently, the business is 50 percent winemaking and 50 percent blueberry production. There are several business entities: the farm, winery, retail store and a beer and wine distribution business.

The Keel family is producing blueberries on 20 net acres. They are also growing blackberries and peaches for U-pick. They are able to buy blueberry culls from other packinghouses across the state and have access to berries from all over the world in the off season. Therefore, they are making wine year-round in Plant City.

Their wine is carried in all of Publix's 770 Florida stores as well as 300 to 400 other retail outlets across the country. So the next time you are shopping at your local Publix, be on the lookout for this Florida product.

Feeding school kids a serious business



by Heather Banky
U.S. Sugar Corporation

Mary Kate Harrison just as easily could have been speaking to us about leading a major corporation rather than overseeing the feeding of Hillsborough County Public Schools' children. Harrison, general manager of the school system's student nutrition services, explained the challenges of managing a \$105 million program that demands a good product at a low cost for more than 214,000 meals served every day. The cheaper, faster, higher-quality push combines three objectives that cannot be easily achieved together, which often means compromise. Ms. Harrison was excited about the opportunities of a fresh fruit and vegetable program, but she emphasized the need for a statewide infrastructure to manage the details of such an endeavor and to ensure its future.

Educating our children on the importance of good nutrition and exposing them to what that means in the form of fresh fruits and vegetable from our home state is definitely worth the effort it will take to give the program a good foundation.



Associations help to market berries



by Justin Roberson
Lipman Produce

The Florida Strawberry Growers Association was started in 1982 and serves growers by raising awareness and promoting Florida berries. It allows growers to collaborate in research and marketing. Florida is primarily known for providing the winter crop and is considered the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World. The Florida Blueberry Growers Association operates in much the same way. In recent years, blueberries have gained momentum and continue to be a favorable spring crop. On our tour of Plant City, we met with Ted Campbell and Bill Braswell of the FSGA and FBGA, respectively, to discuss the associations and industry challenges.

It was surprising to hear that the majority of all strawberry and blueberry varieties come out of Florida. Not only are these varieties being used by growers within the state, but by the rest of the world. In fact, countries such as Spain are large buyers of Florida seed varieties. We also learned that much of the variety research is being conducted by the University of Florida and managed by the grower associations.

Challenges for the berry industry include disease pressure, labor shortages and poor weather. Increased berry acreage also has posed some challenges in the market. Much like the tomato industry, the berry industry is seeing increased supply from Central and South America, namely Mexico and Chile, making these countries strong competitors.

Pressure to the Florida berry industry will likely continue to grow as new varieties and growing regions emerge around the world. However, Florida has many

competitive advantages and must continue to address and compete with these new supplies. The growth of a global economy is not a threat. Rather, it's an opportunity the state should capitalize on for new markets and new trends.

New technology adds precision to farm



by Jennifer Hodges
The Andersons
Plant Nutrient Group

On the final day of the trip, we were fortunate to visit with Larry Moss at Lipman's Duette farm. Larry, who has decades of experience as a farm manager, shared many interesting facts about the history of Lipman and how much he has enjoyed working for the company over the years. I was impressed by the level of commitment this organization puts on food safety and traceability. Employees are required to carry an ID badge and are scanned in and out of each field in which they work. This means not only can the company track the produce from its point of origin; it can trace back to the picker as well.

Larry described the reports that are produced to show where each employee has worked throughout the week. He can look back and find out exactly who was in each field throughout the day. Another interesting fact is Lipman provides housing for its laborers without cost. This is a great incentive for these employees and their families. Larry jumped on our bus and took us through a couple of squash, eggplant and tomato fields. Although our bus driver had a little difficulty navigating the terrain, we made it through, and our group thoroughly enjoyed the visit.

C & D Fruit & Vegetable Company



by Adam Trott
Rabo AgriFinance

With Frank Lombardi as our tour guide, our group visited C&D Fruit & Vegetable Co.'s Dover growing, packing/cooling, and shipping operations.

With strawberry season over and many of the company's vegetables still in the ground, Frank showed off C&D's beautiful eggplants, yellow squash and zucchini, which had been planted in the same beds previously used for strawberries. Frank explained that for more than 30 years, C&D has supplied a variety of fruits and vegetables to customers all over the United States from its numerous locations. The company also grows a proprietary variety of strawberries developed in collaboration with the University of Florida.

While Frank and Sam handle the majority of the sales and farming operations in Dover, C&D also has growing, packing/cooling, and shipping operations in Bradenton. The Bradenton facility includes a market and general store.

The next stop will be a July visit to California to tour ag operations in Salinas and the surrounding areas. Look for those stories and class member profiles in the final issue.