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Special Edition: Reflections

EMERGING TIMES

... growing toward the future

**Emerging leaders reflect
and look toward the future**



Class 4 (left to right): John Alderman, Shine Taylor, Dustin Grooms, Paul Miller, Meghan Pasken, John Beuttenmuller, Nathan Decker, Matt Griffin, Teddy McAvoy and Dan Bott.



Class members of the Emerging Leader Development Program are finding it hard to believe that just one year ago they were meeting for the first time at FFVA 2014. After trips to FFVA's main office, the Capitol in Tallahassee and grower/shipper operations in Florida and California,

the class has made memories to last a lifetime.

In this special edition of the newsletter they reflect on some highlights of the past year as well as how the program will help them as they move forward with their careers.



Continuing my education by seeing the big picture



by Shine Taylor
DuPont Crop Protection

I've spent almost a decade in Florida now after coming down to go to graduate school, and most of it I spent stomping around tomato fields and citrus groves. I've had mostly a research focus since coming to the state, whether figuring out some scientific reason whiteflies like a particular tomato field or determining how the newest product works on a crop or pest.

With the ELDP Class 4, I was able to see and experience the big picture of agriculture in Florida and beyond. I didn't realize the diversity of people and knowledge that goes into getting one crop of lettuce to the grocery store shelves or the inner workings of politics in Tallahassee. I was amazed at all the behind-the-scenes activities taking place around the state to bring Florida products to the consumer, and somehow I felt like a much smaller but even more important part of our great industry. I've learned to value each piece of the puzzle that it takes to make this industry successful and realized that agriculture has an exciting future ahead.

Not only have we been able to learn from our leaders in the industry that we visited with during trips and tours, we've learned from each other and because of our diverse backgrounds. I believe these relationships could become a great value as we continue on in our careers. These experiences will carry me into the future with a broader knowledge of our industry, and I consider the lessons from the past 12 months as among the most important classes I've taken during my lifelong education.

Endless opportunities to see all facets of ag



by Dan Bott
Premier Citrus Management

It has been a privilege to be a part of the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program. The program has provided me with invaluable opportunities to see other facets of the agriculture industry that I have not been previously involved with. Throughout our training sessions, we were exposed to countless networking opportunities, various specialty crops, policymaking and regulatory issues.

Our first session at FFVA's office opened my eyes to the magnitude of the association's operations and the role played in protecting our industry. On our January production trip to Hillsborough, Manatee and Polk counties, we met with a diverse group of exciting personalities who gave a very frank and in-depth look into their operations.

I particularly enjoyed the trip to Tallahassee during the legislative session. It was a priceless opportunity to spend time with legislators discussing various issues affecting the agriculture industry. This session gave us all an opportunity to learn more about the political process and policymaking.

The diversity and magnitude of the California agriculture operations we visited was astounding. It was amazing to see so many different commodities grown in the same area. We got VIP tours of all of the operations, and the level of candor and scope of discussions about each operation was greatly appreciated.

Class 4 of the Emerging Leader Development Program gained exposure to almost every different fruit and vegetable crop grown. The networking opportunities and exposure gained during the program have given me more diverse outlook that will be invaluable during my career within the agriculture industry moving forward.

Gaining a group of friends and colleagues



by Dustin Grooms
Fancy Farms, Inc.

I wish everyone could have the experience of going through the ELDP program. I am thankful and blessed to be one of the fortunate ones to have been chosen to participate in this amazing opportunity. It feels like just yesterday that I was sitting in a conference room with a group of unfamiliar faces at our first ELDP meeting during the FFVA Convention in Naples. Here it is a year later, and those unfamiliar faces are now those I call friends and colleagues and whom I could call upon anytime.

Growing up on a farm, I thought I had a pretty good handle on agriculture, but I found out I was sadly mistaken. My dad would often tell me that there are people fighting for farmers. I always wanted to know who those people were and what exactly they were doing. Through this program, I finally got my chance. At the FFVA headquarters, I quickly learned that FFVA goes to war every day for the industry. We also met key people in Tallahassee who have our backs. During our Central Florida tour, grower/shippers opened the doors wide for our class, which showed the respect they have for FFVA. The last tour was California, which was mind-blowing. I feel like our family farm here in Florida is a garden compared to operations there. All of the hosts were open to sharing information about their operations and answering any questions. Even though we are a great distance apart, it seems we all face the same problems.

My hat goes off to Sonia Tighe for the hard work that she puts into each ELDP session. Only God knows what the future will hold, but I feel that we all will take this experience and apply it to our daily lives. Today I am an emerging leader graduate and in my future I hope to be a leader of great things for Florida agriculture. Thanks again to FFVA and all who support it!



Class 4 joined FFVA board members to tour Tallahassee in March. During their trip the group met with Speaker of the House Steve Crisafulli (center).

Greater appreciation for those in production ag



by John Beuttenmuller
Florida Foundation
Seed Producers, Inc.

Having the opportunity to participate as a member of Class 4 of the ELDP has been an amazing experience that will impact me throughout my career. Looking back on the multitude of our diverse experiences over the course of the past year, it is challenging to choose the most impactful aspect of the program. I have certainly gained an even higher level of appreciation for those involved in production agriculture and the trade and allied organizations that are committed to the growth and continued success

of agriculture in our country. Our Florida and California production trips exposed us to common challenges that U.S. producers face in their operations. These two trips also allowed us to contrast the differences in specialty crop production and the unique challenges and opportunities that producers face in each state. The one constant across all of agriculture is the unrelenting drive for innovation and continuous improvement.

The ELDP also was an invaluable opportunity to network and to develop friendships with other emerging leaders. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in the program. I would like to offer a sincere thanks to Sonia Tighe, Avery LeFils, Lisa Lochridge, Mike Stuart and other FFVA staff and members that have done so much to make this program so impactful.

A wealth of knowledge that is priceless



by Paul Miller
Pioneer Growers Co-Op

I would like to thank Sonia Tighe, the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, and everyone else involved in making this extraordinary yearlong experience possible for the Emerging Leader Development Program.

I didn't know what to expect of the program before attending the first meeting in Naples at last year's FFVA convention, but after each subsequent meeting, I couldn't wait for the next one. Our session in Maitland at the FFVA office with staff offered us insight on the inner workings of FFVA along with how they help their members and the industry as a whole. The crop production session was one I really enjoyed, and it gave me an appreciation for Florida agriculture altogether. We had the privilege to tour several operations and learn what is involved in getting a crop from the ground to the consumer. Our trip to Tallahassee was surreal. We sat down with our state representatives to discuss issues concerning our industry and discover what it takes to get bills passed through the legislative process. The production trip to California was the most remarkable of all the sessions. I enjoyed learning about the different micro-climates spread throughout the state, and the never-ending fields of crops were absolutely mind-boggling.

The wealth of knowledge I acquired throughout the entire program is priceless, and I am grateful to have been a part of ELDP Class 4. If you are in agriculture and are looking for a once-in-a-lifetime experience that will educate you in different areas of our industry while at the same time helping you network with top leaders, I insist you submit an application for this program. Thank you again!



Opportunities to influence the future of agriculture



by Meghan Pasken
Glades Crop Care

It has been a great honor to have been chosen to represent FFVA and our ag community as a member of ELDP Class 4. We experienced agriculture in more ways than I knew were possible. Sonia Tighe and FFVA did an impeccable job of peeling back the many layers of our industry and opening our eyes to the opportunities that exist for young professionals like us

to influence the future of agriculture.

I must admit, initially I was the most nervous about the Tallahassee trip. I thought I would feel out of place at the Capitol and have little in common with the politicians we encountered. I was blown away by how accessible and accommodating our state representatives were. Nearly all of the legislators emphasized the importance of "knocking on their doors" and how much they value a personal visit and direct communication. They truly need to hear our stories to know the genuine concerns of our community. I learned that we all can have a voice in the decisions that are made for our futures; we just have to make the effort to reach out.

I was most impressed with the genuineness with which growers and other ag

professionals revealed their challenges to us and explained how they are overcoming them. We spoke with so many leaders whose commitment was astounding. They candidly shared opinions and perspectives that we took to heart. I wish the American public could better understand the glimpses of agriculture we encountered.

I will certainly recommend this program to my peers and can't thank FFVA and the many other supporters of ELDP enough!

Growth through exposure and education



by John Alderman
Duda Farm Fresh Foods

ELDP Class 4 has been such an amazing experience. I've made professional and personal relationships that will last a lifetime. I was fortunate to be in a class with such diversity in Florida agriculture. We've all learned a lot from each other, and it's been great to see things from different perspectives within our industry.

As I think back on the many operations that we've toured both in Florida and California, there is one specific trait of each company that comes to mind: Be the best you can be in at least one thing. Diversity is needed, but I noticed that each company had that "one thing" it made its mark with and continues to grow with today. There was at least one thing in every presentation, every tour stop, and every educational session that each of us could apply to both our business and personal lives. It has been a pleasure and an honor.



Class members got an up-close look at Tanimura & Antle's lettuce fields during their trip to California.



Program strengthens passion for the industry



by Matt Griffin
Lipman Produce

I first learned about the Emerging Leader Development Program when I attended the FFVA convention a few years ago in Naples as part of a group of students UF brought down in partnership with the Produce Marketing Association. Having met a few of the members of that year's graduating class, I knew that if I ever got the chance I wanted to become a candidate for a class. Three years later, I received that honor and privilege, and I can truly say it has been an amazing experience. During the past year we have been able to familiarize ourselves with the diversity and complexities of this industry and the time and effort it takes to keep it moving forward. I've learned so much through our various trips and sessions.

Having come full circle to graduation, I would like to congratulate and encourage the upcoming class. This program allows for personal growth and strengthens passion for the industry through the interaction with the other class members and individuals you will meet along the way.

I'm proud to be a part of a growing network of young emerging leaders who are taking on the task of making their mark and continuously planting seeds of excellence.

I would like to give a big heartfelt thank you to the FFVA board of directors, Sonia Tighe, Lisa Lochridge, Avery LeFils and everyone for their support and dedication to this program.



One highlight of the Florida production trip was the tour of Wm. P. Hearne Produce's cabbage operation.

Program expanded interest in all agriculture



by Nathan Decker
Seedway

When looking back on this past year and having the opportunity to take part in the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program, there are many great experiences that come to mind. I enjoyed our trip to Tallahassee and meeting with all the representatives interested in preserving one of our state's core businesses: agriculture.

The Florida production trip also was very beneficial. As a person who solely works with the vegetable industry, it is easy for me to work with blinders on as I ride by other agricultural operations. I can't count the times since that trip that I now pay close attention to my surroundings. I hate to admit it, but before if it wasn't vegetable production, I was

not very interested. I find myself now asking other industry reps what farm or grove was back on such-and-such road. What do they produce? Where or who are they shipping it to? I now truly understand I have a vested interest in seeing all of Florida's agriculture succeed. The diversity of Florida agriculture never fails to amaze me, and the Florida production trip helped put that into perspective. It also emphasized the importance of FFVA and the critical role it plays for its members.

The last thing I wanted to touch on is the friendship piece to the program. I didn't know what to expect coming into the program, and our group was very diverse. I can truly say I made some lifelong friends here. The trips were great and the information was better, but sharing in these experiences with the group made the program that much more enjoyable. Thank you to Sonia Tighe, Avery LeFils, Lisa Lochridge and everyone else in the FFVA for organizing this program. It was a great experience, and I highly recommend anyone who has the commitment to this industry to get involved.



Forming a network and lasting friendships



by Teddy McAvoy

I am grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program. Participation in the program has allowed me to experience the political and practical aspects of farming.

The ELDP has made me more aware of the obstacles facing farmers, manmade or otherwise. I have realized that the organization was formed and still stands for growers' interests. In addition, participation in the ELDP has provided valuable networking contacts with growers, legislators, FFVA members and fellow class participants. Not only networking contacts, but lasting friendships were formed directly from the ELDP.

FFVA is a great group that openly welcomes talented young people into the organization and allows for continued future participation on various committees. Without the ELDP, I would not be able to make such an impact for fruit and vegetable producers in Florida. The association's encouragement and guidance of young and enthusiastic individuals benefits both the individual and the fruit and vegetable industry. I can say with pride that "I participated in the ELDP and I got much more than a lousy T-shirt."

The ELDP has instilled in me the values of standing up for and giving back to the less fortunate in our farming community and realizing that we are all connected with a common goal. Thank you for selecting me to participate, learn and grow by partaking in the ELDP. I would like to thank everyone who met with our group, talked with us candidly and hosted us graciously. I would like to express great appreciation and gratitude to the FFVA, especially Sonia Tighe, Lisa Lochridge, Avery LeFils and Jill Dunlop.



On the final day of their session at FFVA's headquarters the group was able to escape the office and tour Taylor Farms' processing facility and deli operations in Orlando.

*Special thanks to all
ELDP supporters who
help to make this
program a success.
We couldn't do it
without you.*