



Volume 3 - Issue 3  
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South Florida Production

# EMERGING TIMES

*... growing toward the future*

## Leadership classes converge to tour South Florida agricultural operations



Members of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program and the Western Growers Future Volunteer Leaders Program stand in front of 2,500 acres of newly planted citrus groves during their recent production tour of South Florida.



The Emerging Leader Development Program's Class 3 recently spent three days touring growing and processing operations in South Florida alongside the current class of the Western Growers Association's Future Volunteer Leader Program. They would like to extend their sincere appreciation for the hospitality shown to them by FFVA members throughout their trip and thank the hosts for setting aside time to be with them.

Class members were able to see a wide range of commodities from sugar cane, which was being burned only feet away from them, to baby spinach fresh cut from

the field.

Tour stops included U.S. Sugar, A. Duda & Sons, Southern Gardens Citrus, Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative, Everglades Research and Education Center, Pioneer Growers Cooperative, TKM Bengard, R.C. Hatton, Inc., Roth Farms, Veg Pro International, Hundley Farms, Lipman Produce and Grower's Management, Inc.

The trip was capped off with a round-table featuring FFVA President Mike Stuart, United Fresh President Tom Stenzel and Western Growers Policy and Strategic Planning Manager Cory Lunde.



## Spending time in tomatoes



by Cathy Atchley  
On Point Ag

Our South Florida production tour started out with a rush. We had the rush of a cool morning in the 40s, the rush and excitement of having our class combined with the Western Growers Future Volunteer Leaders Program group and an eagerness to learn. We did not however, have the rush of the bus through one of those sandy turns on the farm near Loxahatchee!

Only minutes into our tour with Jamie Williams and Jason Eppolito of Lipman Produce, we were stuck. And while we thought the 25 of us could push the charter bus out, we instead got to see a track tractor up close and personal.

As the largest field tomato grower in North America, Lipman grows Roma, round and grape tomatoes, among others. Williams talked about the company and answered questions. We discussed labor, the economics of harvesting and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. We learned that Jamie grew up in a family farm business.

We walked through some tomato fields and observed the staking and tying, and I even tested the finish product. This was the prime time for our group members to pull Williams and Eppolito aside to ask questions about production practices, frequency of sprays, irrigation, etc. While some of us were learning about crops we may not be familiar with, others in our group were able to trade notes on the similarities and differences in Florida vs. California production. Thanks to both of our hosts for their insight and time.

## Surviving and thriving



by Jordan Theis  
Prudential Ag Investments

Orange juice is the essence of Florida, the quintessential drink of the Sunshine State. But citrus greening is ravaging the citrus industry across the state. No citrus-producing county has been spared the devastating effects of the disease, which includes early fruit drop, undersized fruit and dead trees.

Southern Gardens, under the leadership of Rick Kress, is facing this challenge head-on. Southern Gardens is the world's largest supplier of pure not-from-concentrate orange juice for both major brands as well as the private label industry. As a major stakeholder in the fight against citrus greening, Southern Gardens uses various tactics to combat the disease. Aggressive spray regimens help keep the Asian Citrus Psyllid at bay. Test plots are planted with disease-resistant citrus varieties that may one day represent the salvation of the citrus

industry.

Southern Gardens' processing facilities are state-of-the-art with the ability to process up to 20 million boxes of oranges, producing over 100 million gallons of orange juice. Our class saw each stage of the process, from offloading the oranges to drinking a delicious glass of the finished product. But the real magic happened in between. With hundreds of workers carefully monitoring every step of the process, we got a sense of appreciation for a carton of orange juice. Our voices echoed off the cavernous walls of an empty million-gallon container vat.

We stood mesmerized by the infinite march of round oranges down a conveyor belt to be instantly sized, graded and juiced. Scientists in lab coats bustled about testing each batch of orange juice. Steel pipes intricately crisscrossed the entire complex like something from M.C. Escher. The amount of byproducts that can be created with a simple orange are truly mind boggling: animal feed, cleaning solution, fragrances, oils, etc.

Seeing firsthand the diligence of Southern Gardens, and the effort it is putting in the fields, farms and factory made me confident that the Florida citrus industry will not only survive, but will once again thrive.



The sandy soils of the tomato fields at the first stop proved to be more challenging than anticipated for our tour bus. Thankfully the seasoned professionals at Lipman had a tractor on standby.





Paul Orsenigo of Grower's Management, Inc. hosted the class on its final and coldest morning of touring. He quickly got them active by having them assist in harvesting baby spinach.

## Leaders in Florida ag



by Clayton Norman  
DuPont Crop Protection

Hundley Farms was an outstanding stop on our tour. The name may ring a bell if you've been reading this newsletter from the beginning of the program. Andy Ballard, who works for Hundley Farms, is a graduate of the first ELDP class. What a treat to visit with one of our own leaders who went through the program.

John Scott Hundley and Ballard went through the details of their daily operations. This third-generation family farm is heavy in the growing of sweet corn, snap beans, sugar cane, rice and more on 17,000 acres. Hundley recently celebrated its 80th year in the business. What an achievement in what most would consider a harsh environment for success. Hundley Farms operates in Georgia as well. It is involved in the value-added business with its tray pack and microwavable offerings and has fully operational bean and sweet corn packing lines. Hundley Farms has partnered with stores and brands you may know, including Winn Dixie, Goya and Green Giant just to name a few.

Our visit was extra special because we had the Western Growers Association class from drought-stricken California with us. Their jaws dropped when Hundley explained how the water table is raised for irrigation. One

challenge we had to overcome during our visit was the cold temperatures. Ballard explained the process of using helicopters to hover over their consumable crops to try to save them when the temperatures drop to around 32 degrees. Two or three degrees and one or two hours can determine the fate of an entire crop.

It was a pleasure listening to Hundley and Ballard during the tour. It's amazing that these individuals took the time to open their doors up to our programs during such a crazy time with the weather being as cold as it was. They have a passion for educating what seems to be fewer and fewer young people in this industry. This company and the individuals who run it are leaders in Florida agriculture, and I personally along with the group had an amazing experience learning about Hundley Farms.

## Dealing with the challenges in the EAA



by Daniel Cavazos  
Veg Pro International

The last stop on our South Florida production trip took us to Grower's Management, Inc., which is co-owned by Paul Orsenigo and David Basore. Their vast array of crops include baby spinach, arugula, endive, escarole, red and green leaf lettuce, Boston,

iceberg, romaine, parsley, cilantro, Chinese cabbage, kale, green beans and sweet corn. Given the diversification of their crops, one could see how food safety could be a challenge. Orsenigo stressed the importance of protecting the integrity of their commodities. "Maintaining a clean work environment is essential," he said. GMI has turned to the use of RPCs for the packaging and shipping of their crops. RPCs optimize the value of their products and reduce costs as they move through the supply chain.

Labor is a challenge Basore is all too familiar with. Getting the skilled workforce to thin and harvest the crop is becoming more of a challenge for GMI, he said. The company has invested in innovative ways to harvest and pack its product. A few members of our group were fortunate enough to try our hand at harvesting and packing baby spinach. Unique harvesting equipment allows GMI to pack product more efficiently, reducing manual labor. GMI has also developed a mobile loading dock, which allows expediting product to the packing house. Weeding and thinning costs average around \$400 per acre, Basore said, which shows why innovation and reduced labor are a top priority.

As our tour of GMI ended, Basore expressed his view on leadership programs for young ag professionals. "I feel very strongly about the programs, and I appreciate the time you guys take in getting involved with the industry," he said. But in reality, we as young leaders are the ones who are in debt to the individuals who have taken the time to show us their operations. The opportunity to get an inside view of these growers' operations will pay dividends as our careers progress.





## A glimpse of greening and growth



by Matt Stacey  
Crop Production Services

Rob Atchley, general manager of citrus production, was our host for the A. Duda and Sons tour in Felda. After an exchange of formalities, Atchley educated the group on the day-to-day operations and challenges they face, especially greening. "When greening first appeared we began to aggressively pull trees, with the idea being to remove trees with even minor symptoms." This was important to point out because some in our group are encountering greening for the first time in California. "However, due to the latent period of the disease, greening had been present for some time, and this resulted in the removal of 19,000 trees," Atchley said. The economic impact of such a venture weighed on the minds of the citrus producers from California as the tour bus rolled by acre after acre of citrus.

The next phase of the tour brought forth hope and optimism for the industry: a sprawling, 2,500-acre development of young trees. Due to Duda's aggressive approach to greening, combined with its reputation as a high-quality grower, a contract has been secured to allow not only for stability, but also growth in total acres of production.

The weather had fully cooperated and gators were confidently sunbathing on the banks of canals, much to the amazement of our California counterparts. Questions filled the bus: How is the fishing? What are the seasons for deer, hog and turkey hunting? When is the final phase of fruit harvesting?

As the tour bus slowed to a halt in front of one of the farm houses, the smell of grilled steaks filled the air. Grove Superintendent Mike Martin, Grove Supervisor Matt Reichenbach, Grove Supervisor Curtis Slade, Head of Research and Development Joby Sherrod and Senior VP of Land Matters Tommy Duda, all deserve special recognition for the great meal that was prepared for the group. They were also held responsible for the heavy sets of eyelids during the afternoon session of our tour.



Duda recently planted roughly 2,500 acres of citrus trees and has plans for more soon.



Lunch was graciously provided and prepared by grove supervisors at Duda. A menu of steak, fresh salad, grilled corn on the cob, baked potatoes and peach cobbler did not disappoint.





During the visit to the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative class members were treated to lunch and a tour of the entire sugar cane processing facility, from raw commodity to the finished product ready to be shipped to a refinery.

## The sweeter side of the EAA



by Daniel Cavazos  
Veg Pro International



by Sam Glucksman  
Glades Crop Care

the cooperative, which generates over 4,000 jobs and more than \$4 billion in sales per year.

The vertically integrated agricultural enterprise comprises 46 small to medium-size growers. Members farm 70,000 acres and produce 350,000 tons of raw sugar every year. The SCGC has one of the largest mills in the world and grinds approximately 26,000 tons of sugar cane daily, running 24 hours a day.

The video touched on how the sugar industry is politically driven by environmental forces. Environmental activist groups are constantly trying to drive agriculture out of the EAA. Best management practices have helped farmers reduce the use of chemicals, fertilizers and pesticides, resulting in cleaner water and healthier soil. BMPs have proven to reduce phosphorus loads into the waterways by more than 50 percent, significantly higher than the required standards set by the EPA. Technology and innovation have helped the conservation of the EAA. Crop rotation, laser leveling, precise pesticide and fertilizer applications and water management have helped to cut phosphorous loads and soil subsidence, providing for a sustainable sugar cane

farming for future generations. In essence, we have cleaner water and healthier soil.

We were privileged to tour the SCGC mill. The class experienced the entire process, from loads of fresh-cut sugar cane arriving at the mill, through the grinding and separation process, and all the way to the crystallization of raw sugar.

Miedema pointed out that the sugar cane process uses every part of the stalk. "The fiber is used for fuel, the water for processing, the mill muds to replenish the soil, and the molasses is used for food stocks for humans and animals. We are truly progressive farmers from a sustainable viewpoint," she said.

After the tour, there was one question for Miedema: Where are all the ants? She explained that raw sugar is primarily sucrose, and sucrose is hygroscopic. This means that it binds to water readily, and if ants or any other animal were to ingest the sucrose it would quickly dehydrate them.

At the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative in Belle Glade, Vice President of Public Affairs & Communications Barbara Miedema greeted us with an educational video that featured employees and growers discussing the sugar industry in the Everglades Agricultural Area. Most of the citizens in the Glades are directly or indirectly tied in to the sugar cane process of





## Lettuce talk from Veg Pro International



by Elton Baldy  
Bayer CropScience

Your mother probably told you, "Eat your veggies." Our class had the opportunity to visit a first-class farming operation in the Belle Glade area: Veg Pro International. The FFVA and WGA leadership groups experienced firsthand the harvest of mixed greens, as well as the packing, handling and shipping facilities of Veg Pro International.

We gained a great deal of insight from the Veg Pro staff about their business, including production practices, harvesting challenges and shipping and handling logistics. We toured field production and packing facilities and found that leaf growers are not exempt from the many complexities of fresh vegetable production. As many growers do, they face challenges such as food safety, labor, environmental issues, rising costs and disease and nutrient management, not to mention consumer demands.

The trip was an eye-opening experience on the level of technology, expertise and coordination a leaf grower must execute to be successful in the industry. There are many well-timed steps involved for that simple bowl of salad to arrive on your table. This experience has provided me a new appreciation for those famous leafy greens my mother told me to eat. I would like to add a special thanks to Doug Enders, Carlos Restrepo and all support staff for their time and attention during this very valuable farm and facility tour.



Rick Roth explains radish harvesting equipment after a quick demonstration.



Vibrant leaf lettuce at Veg Pro International.



Veg Pro is experimenting with protective netting over some leaf varieties.

## Rich history and a bright future



by Cathy Atchley  
On Point Ag

Our final stop of day two ended with personality and passion. Rick Roth was our tour guide at Roth Farms and started out by discussing the family business. His family began farming in the Belle Glade area in 1948. He introduced a host of winter vegetable crops they grow, including lettuces, radish, cilantro and green beans, and gave us some trivia. Their township 40, range 40 sits 240 miles directly south and east of Tallahassee. Another tidbit: It is possible for a wind from the northwest to travel to their property without crossing coastal water. It was quite evident that Rick Roth loves the industry we're in, the area he lives and farms in and the challenges of life on the farm.

Roth discussed with us the uniqueness of farming in the EAA, some of the economic differences (sugar cane vs. vegetables), and stewardship of the land. He echoed what others said about the importance of sugar cane in the EAA. Ensuring stability of the land, the sugar cane industry provides returns for the land in terms of dollars as well as soil health, helps balance the land-use equation and provides numerous benefits to the area -- even to those vegetable growers who don't grow it.

Roth also discussed some of the history of Belle Glade farmers banding together politically to look out for the long-term interests of the land and farmers. These hard-working individuals are in it for the long haul, and some still have a strong presence in FFVA. This discussion was a reminder that we're all in this together and must cooperate and communicate to meet our common long-term industry goals.

Before ending this stop, we were treated to a radish harvest demonstration, and ended the day with the sun going down over the beautiful crops in the EAA.



## The perfect partnership



by Jeff Goodale  
Duda Farm Fresh Foods



by Jamie Lang  
PNC Bank

On our visit to the South Bay facilities of Hugh Branch, Performance Packaging, and R.C. Hatton, the classes were welcomed by Paul Allen and his son Jonathan. Paul is president of the Sunshine Sweet Corn Farmers of Florida, and Jonathan is a graduate of ELDP Class 2. Paul, who also co-owns Performance Packaging and R.C. Hatton, introduced the classes to Brett Bergmann, co-owner of Hugh Branch. Paul emphasized the scope of Branch's presence in the industry by pointing out that it markets the equivalent of nearly 4 million crates of corn a year while also having a significant presence in other items such as green beans.

Bergmann spoke about the history of Hugh Branch and explained that it is a year-round supplier of sweet corn from Florida, Georgia, Missouri and Colorado. Regarding sales philosophy, Bergmann said the sales team takes seriously its responsibility to the growers who entrust them to sell their product. The farmer is a businessman looking for a return on investment, and his team's responsibility is to garner the best return possible. In addition to marketing, another area Branch takes very seriously is food safety. As a result of this focus, he was proud to state that Branch had just received its highest Primus audit score ever.

After a Q&A, class members observed the quality control team inspect some corn that had come in earlier that day. Next Jonathan showed the classes the R.C. Hatton bulk corn packing line.

He explained R.C. Hatton's innovative approach to sweet corn handling and packing. Instead of harvesting and packing in the field, as most shippers do, Hatton transports har-

vested corn to the facility in specially designed bins, where it is then packed into the final container on a double packing line.

The class also met Dan Allen, packinghouse manager for Performance Packaging. He showed the group the value-added green beans and tray pack corn products being produced. The tray pack line was running so we were able to see firsthand the grading and packing process. Dan also had a nice display of the various sizes and types of bagged green beans being produced. Among numerous other offerings were a 12-ounce microwavable bag and a larger five-pound club pack.

The visit to Hugh Branch and Performance Packaging culminated with a group photo in front of their impressive graphic wrapped tractor-trailer.

## Resiliency leads to lettuce success



by Ryan Atwood  
Keyplex

One of the stops on our South Florida tour was TKM Bengard Farms, the largest grower of

lettuce east of the Mississippi River. The Basore family, which is a partner in the farm, first moved to the Belle Glade area in the 1960s to farm onions. After some financially difficult years, three of the brothers decided to form TKM, which is named for brothers Toby, Keith and Mark. A number of years ago they formed a partnership with Bengard, which farms in the western United States.

Our tour guide was Stephen Basore, who is the food safety manager. He spoke of the importance and advantages of farming on muck soils. He also spoke about the loss of soils to oxidation and the conservation efforts used by farmers to preserve the muck. Basore also gave some insight about the tight-knit community of growers in the Belle Glade area and mentioned the importance of the sugar cane industry to their farming efforts.

Additionally, we were given a tour of the processing facility that is shared with Veg Pro International. They showed how nitrogen is used to prevent oxygen from accelerating the decay of lettuce after it is harvested. We saw how the lettuce was being processed into value-added packaging. It was also mentioned that if you had eaten any salad on the East Coast lately, most likely it had been grown by TKM Bengard. I personally took away from the visit that farmers are interdependent to be successful, and resiliency is required for long-term success.



At Hugh Branch, the class learned about the company's commitment to quality.





## Burn, harvest, dump, repeat



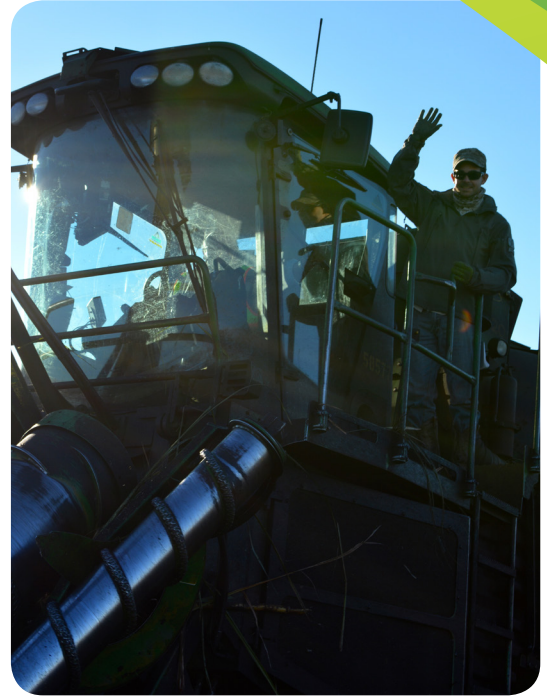
by Geoff Roe  
Wm. G. Roe & Sons

Our tour of U.S. Sugar Corporation's harvesting operation started with Ken McDuffie explaining the process of cane being dumped from field cars into rail cars, which occurs on U.S. Sugar's 120 miles of internal railroad. Each rail car holds up to 40 tons of cane, equivalent to the harvest of one acre, which will in turn yield about 9,000 pounds of sugar. The process of loading cane into rail cars and transporting it from the field to the processing plant allows U.S. Sugar to be efficient and reduce traffic on local roads.

After we watched cane tumble from field cars into rail cars, it was time to see the har-

vesting process up close. With the blessing of Heather Banky, U.S. Sugar's fleet manager, brave volunteers rode in a harvester as it made a round in the field. On board we saw the delicate balance between cutting the cane too low, causing the machine to slow down, or cutting too high and leaving product in the field. Also critical to the process is the relationship between tractor drivers transporting cane in field cars and harvester operators. Keeping harvesters supplied with empty field cars is key to U.S. Sugar's 24-hour harvest.

Our last stop was the burn, which is actually the start of the whole process. It was evident we saved the best for last. The cool, dry air on the morning of our trip helped to make the experience all the more exciting. Before the ignition crew could make its way around the field, we were witnessing flames dozens of feet into the air. The result, after only a few moments, was a field of cane ready to harvest, free of excess vegetation that would otherwise slow down the operation.



Sam Glucksman was one of many who decided to go along for the ride in a sugar cane harvester.



Matt Stacey poses in front of a freshly burned cane field during the field tour of U.S. Sugar. The fire was a welcome sight for class members as temperatures dipped into the 30s that morning.



Senior Vice President of U.S. Sugar Ken McDuffie took class members above the sugar cane elevator to explain the logistics of U.S. Sugar's short line railway system.





Panelists candidly discussed their thoughts on the tough issues facing the agriculture industry.

## Gathering around the table with industry leaders



by Elton Baldy  
Bayer CropScience

are many issues facing growers and industry partners today. Many issues are a common link for growers across the country to come together and brainstorm on proactive measures to defend our essential industry. The sharing of ideas and discourse on key topics helps us to strengthen our message and solve complex problems that we face daily.

This meeting was a great opportunity to hear from a diverse group of production partners. There could not have been a more appropriate conclusion to a very informative tour of South Florida agriculture.

On our recent extensive agricultural tour of South Florida, the ELDP group joined members of the Western Growers' Future Volunteers Leaders Program in Belle Glade for a round-table discussion with several key industry partners. The discussion was led by Mike Stuart, FFVA president; Tom Stenzel, president of United Fresh Produce Association; Cory Lunde, project manager of Western Growers; and moderated by Sonia Tighe, executive director of the Florida Specialty Crop Foundation. Topics ranged from fundamental issues such as water use in California, to more complex topics such as labor policy across the United States. Topics such as food safety, agricultural literacy and environmental regulation kept all participants engaged. Panelists gave valuable insight on the Farm Bill and historic agricultural policy that has affected production today and will greatly impact production in the future.

Many local growers and shippers ranging from citrus to sugar cane to specialty vegetables joined the two leadership groups at the meeting.

Producing a crop is no simple task. There

*The class travels to Tallahassee to tour the Capitol and meet with legislators during their next session. Look for those stories in the next issue.*

# ELDP ALUMNI

*. . . updates from Class 1 & 2*



## **Amber Kosinsky**

The Inaugural Bright House Networks Strawberry Picking Challenge, held February 8 and hosted by Wish Farms, raised approximately \$75,000 for Redlands Christian Migrant Association.

Ultimately, the Ed & Barbara Bergmann Team, coached by Donnie Randall of Fancy Farms, was named the top finisher and recognized for its picking prowess with individual strawberry trophies as well as the coveted "Strawberry Joe" perpetual trophy.

The daylong event, emceed by Bay News 9 TV anchor Veronica Cintron, featured family-friendly events such as strawberry picking for children, a balloon artist, games, music and activities with Radio Disney, and special appearances by the Florida Strawberry Festival queen and court, Tampa Bay Buccaneers cheerleaders and Wish Farms' Misty the Garden Pixie. Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam even stopped by to participate as part of the team from Fresh From Florida. He is pictured above with members of the Farm Credit of Central Florida team.

## **Ian Bessell**

I am now a part-time lecturer at Northeastern University in its Master of Science in Regulatory Affairs of Food and Food Industries program in addition to my full-time job at Birko.

## **Michael Hill**

I have recently been appointed to serve on the board of directors for the Florida Blueberry Growers Association.

## **April Roe Porter**

My husband Kyle and I are expecting our first child, a baby girl, in July!