

EMERGING TIMES

... growing toward the future

Class 2 travels to South Florida to learn about specialty crop agriculture



Class members Nick Basore, Derek Orsenigo, Thomas Dalton, Jessica Kerstein, Joby Sherrod, Carleton Johns, Lee Ann Hinton Coleman, Ian Bessell, Tom Mitchell, Amber Kosinsky, and Jonathan Allen joined by Clayton Norman of DuPont Crop Protection at Hugh H. Branch, Inc. for a tour of the sweet corn and green bean packing facilities. DuPont is a sustaining sponsor of the ELDP.



The Emerging Leader Development Program's Class 2 recently spent three days touring growing and processing operations in South Florida. 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. They also spent time with the United

Fresh Produce Association's leadership program over dinner at the Everglades Research and Education Center.

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



R.C. Hatton and Hugh Branch do it all



by Joby Sherrod
A. Duda & Sons, Inc.

The country's largest distributor of sweet corn and a grower/packer with a commitment to quality, the family-owned companies Hugh Branch Inc. and R.C. Hatton Inc. have been providing quality produce from South Florida for 60 years. During our recent visit to their facilities on 45 acres in South Bay, we were greeted by Paul Allen, co-owner of R.C. Hatton, and Brett Bergmann, president of Hugh Branch Inc.

Bergmann introduced us to the sales organization and shared with us how the company's "sales office in the round" allows the staff to be the most effective and proactive in dealing with such fast-paced and ever-changing market conditions in the produce industry. Shipping sweet corn, green beans, leaf lettuce and celery, Branch has an exceptional food safety record, evidenced by its 98.01 percent average Primus Global Food Safety audit and their recent efforts to become compliant with the Produce Traceability Initiative.

Allen walked us through the facility, explaining R.C. Hatton's innovative approach to sweet corn handling and packing. Instead of harvesting and packing in the field, it transports harvested corn to the facility in specially designed bins, where it is then packed into reusable RPCs on the largest double-line sweet corn packing line. The corn is hydro-cooled and cold stored until it's ready to be shipped directly to retail outlets. The company's value-added facility packs sweet corn and green beans for the retail and food service industry. Dan Allen, manager of R.C. Hatton's packing operations, gave us a tour of the green bean packing line, where beans freshly harvested are washed and sorted and prepped for bulk or value-added packaging. These innovations, along with their commitment to quality, make R.C. Hatton and Hugh Branch an exceptional grower/packer/shipper operation.

Sugar cane growers invest in water quality



by Ian Bessell
ABC Research Laboratories

On the second day of our January production tour, the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida hosted our class for lunch at its office. We also were treated to a presentation by Barbara Miedema, vice president of public affairs and communications. She provided us with an overview of the history of the modern Everglades, "The Everglades – A Century in the Making" including the "Challenges and Opportunities from Ag's Perspective." It was an interesting history lesson about the politics and struggle over one of Florida's most precious resources, fresh water.

We learned that sugar cane is the highest value row crop in Florida with an estimated value of \$1 billion per year. More than 400,000 acres of sugar cane are grown on organic and mineral soils in Palm Beach, Hendry, Glades and Martin counties

in South Florida. Farmers have achieved a long-term average annual reduction of 55 percent in nutrients leaving the farming region through the implementation of farm best management practices. As a result the farming region is a net sink in absorbing phosphorus, the primary nutrient of concern. And \$1.8 billion already has been invested in water quality improvements, reducing phosphorus by 79 percent.

During the three-day production tour, we learned from various FFVA members how production of fresh fruits and vegetables involves many disciplines, from food safety to pesticide use to fleet management on a very large scale. Although most people think of farming as growing a crop in the soil, the truth is that today's 21st century farmers have to be just as educated on the current politics of water use, immigration reform and health care as they are on issues such as disease and pest pressures, good management practices and the role the weather plays in production. It was a very insightful trip, especially because we were able to hear people firsthand share their thoughts and opinions on the current state and future direction of production agriculture in Florida.



Class members stand next to the aptly nicknamed mountain of sugar at the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative.



Roth values relationships



by Derek Orsenigo
Grower's Management, Inc.

During the ELDP's three-day tour of South Florida agriculture, the class stopped at Roth Farms of Belle Glade for a thorough farm tour and great discussion of issues facing the industry. Owner Rick Roth led the tour of the sugar cane and vegetable operations, which included several stops to observe the production of sugar cane, radishes, celery, sweet corn and a variety of leafy vegetables. As owner of one of the most diverse farms in the state, Roth provided the class with an in-depth look at what it takes to be a successful and efficient growing operation. Considering the trials and tribulations that Florida growers face daily, Roth Farms has stayed ahead of the curve and been able to thrive for the long run.

As a third-generation farmer, Roth traces his roots back to Ohio, where his father and grandfather were lettuce and radish growers. His dad made the venture down to Florida in 1948. Roth Farms was established and took root in Belle Glade. During the past 65 years, the company has grown into a well-known operation. With a clear focus on high food safety standards and positive environmental impact, the farm is able to provide an excellent product to the consumer.

These principles of success can be seen in the field, where there are numerous cultural and best management practices that promote good farm performance while resulting in minimal environmental impact. Roth explained the battle that farmers face when dealing with media and public perception in relation to the environment. Through positive farming practices and good public relations, he is able to illustrate that farmers were the first environmentalists and will continue to take care of the land. The successful values of the operation can also be seen in the packinghouse, a

state-of-the-art facility using modern grading and packaging methods that result in a quality product.

Roth is a passionate advocate and spokesman and has a knack for promoting a positive image of growers and their operations. While maintaining high farm standards and progressive relationships with the agriculture community, Roth Farms continues to stay at the forefront of the industry.



Rick Roth addresses the class in the field during one of many stops during the tour of his farming operations.



Joby Sherrod, current class member and employee of A. Duda & Sons, shares some projects that are currently being tested in the groves.



Class members watch from above as trucks carrying sugar cane offload into railroad cars.

Duda blends history with innovation



by Jonathan Allen
R.C. Hatton, Inc.

During the most recent session of ELDLP Class 2, we visited one of the largest family-owned farms in Florida, A. Duda & Sons. On this trip we visited the LaBelle operation. Still functioning strongly today after 90 years, Duda comprises 8,000 acres of Florida groves. The family also has more land in Florida and other citrus operations in Texas. With roughly 15 percent of the current season harvest done mechanically, Duda produces a vast amount of quality citrus fruit every year.

Being a large supplier of white grapefruit, red grapefruit, tangerines, oranges and lemons requires a balance between quality and quantity. As a successful, family-owned farm, hard work and devotion from their team are a tradition. A fine example is veteran employee Rob Atchley, with 15 years of experience with the company's citrus operations in Florida and Texas. To better manage diseases such as greening, they have increased the intensity of their scouting program. Additionally, fungicide application has increased because of citrus canker.

Duda is cooperating with IFAS on experimental methods for young citrus trees on a 10-acre plot. They are conducting tests using a reflective plastic mulch with the goal of repelling the Asian citrus psyllid (the carrier of HLB) and preventing the spread of the disease.

This family-run business represents 90 years of strong work ethic and commitment. Their mission is to grow Christian faith and business integrity; land values and vibrant communities; families, people and relationships; healthy food products; sustainable wealth and balanced financial returns; all for future generations.



U.S. Sugar focused on operational precision



by Carleton Johns
Tater Farms

The first stop on our South Florida Production trip brought us deep into the heart of sugar cane country. Once we disembarked from our bus we were completely surrounded by mature sugar cane fields being harvested. We were outside of Clewiston somewhere in the middle of U.S. Sugar's nearly 180,000-acre cane farm, and from atop one of their transfer stations literally all you could see in every direction was sugar cane.

It was the middle of the 82nd harvest season, which runs 24 hours a day from October to April. When this season concludes, U.S. Sugar will have processed more than 7 million tons for the year. The roads were a steady stream of tractors hauling freshly harvested cane to transfer stations, where it was loaded onto rail cars to be hauled to the processing plant. Out in the field, we watched workers burn a cane field, which is done to remove excess foliage and allow for a faster and cleaner harvest process.

Ken McDuffie, senior vice president of cane operations, and Heather Banky, agriculture business solutions manager and an ELDP Class 1 graduate, were our guides. They both emphasized U.S. Sugar's current focus on precision agriculture. It is not a new philosophy to our industry; in fact, it is becoming increasingly critical to maintaining a profitable business. The practice means focusing on doing the right operation at the right time and in the right way to reduce down time, increase yields, reduce inputs and increase efficiency -- all of which help to increase the bottom line.

U.S. Sugar is the only cane grower in the United States that ships 100 percent of raw cane to a processing plant via railroad. It owns a short-line railroad which, among other ways, helps the company stay competitive by transporting bulk inputs more efficiently. The company also is working

on a comprehensive system to help monitor and manage the entire U.S. Sugar fleet to make sure that everything is being utilized to the max; no small feat since its fleet contains more than 2,500 pieces of equipment.



Thomas Dalton inspects hot sugar crystals during processing at the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative mill.



Ken McDuffie, senior vice president of cane operations for U.S. Sugar, speaks with class members about the logistics of burning sugar cane.



Train cars full of sugar cane ready to be hauled to U.S. Sugar's processing facility.

Sugar processing step-by-step



by Lee Ann Hinton Coleman
Hinton Farms Produce, Inc.

A highlight of Class 2's South Florida trip was being able to see various phases of sugar production, from growing in the field to its final state of raw sugar.

Our tour of the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative was very informative and eye-opening. From my perspective growing strawberries, which go straight from field to consumer, it's easy to forget that everything is not quite so simple. The process of harvesting and processing the cane is quite extensive. From the burns in the field, to harvesting and cutting, transportation to the processing facility, and pressing and spinning into sugar, everything is on a massive scale.

The amount of machinery required to complete the process is mind-boggling. It was described as regular machinery on steroids. It was also interesting to see the level of automation involved. All of the machinery is monitored by computer, including the scientific testing on the product. I certainly learned a lot of new things about processing and sugar in general on this tour.



In the field with TKM Bengard Farms



by Jessica Kerstein
Lipman

We had a great time during our farm tour at TKM Bengard Farms thanks to Steve Basore, Michael Johnson, Ethan Basore, and one of our very own class members, Nick Basore.

We saw two different iceberg lettuce harvests: bulk and commodity. The bulk lettuce is sent to processors and the commodity is used for retail. For the bulk lettuce harvest, workers must chop the lettuce, pull off the wrapper leaves, core it with a knife and throw it onto the conveyor belt where it is washed under a lightly chlorinated rinse. The highlander machine is a moving conveyor belt that sends the lettuce upward, dropping it into one of the 16 to 18 bins (each weighing 800 pounds) on a flatbed truck that is being pulled by a bulldozer. It takes three machines to harvest lettuce. The commodity lettuce harvest is a similar process, but the whole head of lettuce is wrapped individually and placed directly into a carton in the field.

We also saw two romaine lettuce harvests. The bulk romaine, sent to processors, is called trim romaine. In TKM Bengard's value-added process, the top is trimmed off and the head is cored to make it easier for the processor to handle. The commodity romaine lettuce is wrapped in cartons. These also are sent up on a conveyor belt.

When all the bins are full, the flatbed is backed up to a ramp in the field, where a forklift transfers it to a refrigerated tractor-trailer, which takes the lettuce to the cooler. All lettuce is hand-harvested, and it takes a group of 28 to 34 people at a time.

We learned that TKM Bengard uses seep irrigation and the perfect condition for lettuce to grow in Florida is a dry 80 degrees during the day and 60 degrees at night.

Our stop at TKM Bengard was fun and informative.

They have it down to a science



by Amber Kosinsky
Wish Farms

Our tour of TKM Bengard, a family-owned fourth-generation lettuce farm, started first in the field and ended at the company's state-of-the-art processing facility.

Our guide Stephen Basore, director of food safety, is one of six Basore sons working for the family farm, which was started by their grandfather in the 1930s.

Originally onion farmers in Michigan, the family found their way to Belle Glade's rich, black muck soil. Known as pioneer lettuce growers in Florida, TKM Bengard now grows a full array of lettuce varieties. Today they are the largest lettuce grower east of the Mississippi.

The bagged salad market has continued to grow in popularity over the last 20 years. Value-added bagged lettuce producers were mostly based on the west coast, but as demand continued to increase TKM Bengard saw an opportunity.

In 2003, TKM Bengard constructed a 70,000- square-foot packing facility

and pre-cooler. Fast forward 10 years, now roughly 90 percent of the company's business goes to processors.

Bins and cartons of lettuce along with totes of different spring mix varieties are brought to the pre-cooler straight from the field, placed in vacuum tubes where heat is pulled from the product and the temperature is reduced to 34 degrees. When bins of cleaned and cored iceberg are cooled, nitrogen is added at the end of the cycle to prevent oxidation.

From cut to cool, there is a four-hour maximum time frame. As Stephen explained, there was a significant learning curve, but now TKM Bengard Farms has its harvesting, pre-cooling, and shipping processes down to a science.

During our tour of Cypress Cooling, our group stood in a room overlooking the Salade Etc. processing facility with a full aerial view of the spring mix processing in action. The space was filled with large stainless steel equipment that towered multiple stories high. Line workers standing at their assigned stations were covered head to toe in white uniforms and hairnets. Spring mix goes through a triple-wash cycle and then is placed into bags or clam shells.

From the field to the processing facility, the opportunity to tour TKM Bengard's operation was a very eye-opening experience that I am grateful to share. I can be certain the next time I pick up a bag of salad or head of lettuce I will appreciate it that much more.



Amber Kosinsky and Jessica Kerstein pose with fresh-cut lettuce from the fields of TKM Bengard Farms.



Class members had a chance to meet and mingle with members of the United Fresh Produce Association's leadership program over dinner one evening at the Everglades Research and Education Center.



The class, representatives of U.S. Sugar and Sonia Tighe pose in front of a sugar cane harvester. Special thanks to Gaylon Pfeiffer with BASF for sponsoring the class' white Columbia logo shirts.

Leaders all around us



by Thomas Dalton
Farm Credit of Central Florida

After an eventful day filled with farm, facility, and mill tours, the ELDP class received a warm reception from Dr. Robert Gilbert and the Everglades Research and Education Center in Belle Glade. In addition to a wonderful dinner, the ELDP class spent time with the United Fresh Produce Association Leadership group and learned a great deal about the mission and the history of the EREC.

The EREC's mission is to conduct research and extension programs in southern Florida that will explore and promote profitable and sustainable agricultural systems. These systems should conserve and protect the soil, water and natural resources and contribute to an improved quality of life for Floridians. Because of the delicate nature of the Everglades' ecosystem, the EREC strives to meet its mission while working with farmers to improve plant varieties and increase crop yields.

The EREC is the only research facility in the United States located on subtopic organic soils. The center's 800 acres are planted with multiple crops representative of the area. The center has advanced from its initial research to focusing currently on rice, sod, sugar cane, vegetables, wildlife and other environmental issues. The EREC is staffed with scientists specializing in multiple disciplines.

Soil erosion was a concern that was mentioned throughout the trip. At the EREC in 1924, a nine-foot concrete post was driven into the ground until the top of the post was level with soil surface. About 50 years later, a photo of the same post shows about 58 inches of erosion. In March 2005, another 14 inches were exposed, indicating that about six feet of soil had eroded in 81 years. The EREC is working to solve the problem of erosion using Best Management Practices. The BMPs in effect now have helped to slow it from about one inch per year to a half-inch. The center also is experimenting with alternative crops that could be grown to adapt to the changes in resources.



Nothing goes to waste at Southern Gardens



by Tom Mitchell
Riverfront Packing
Company, LLC

The ELDP class traveled to Clewiston and met with Rick Kress, president of Southern Gardens Citrus. Southern Gardens is one of Florida's largest citrus growers in addition to having a state-of-the-art processing facility. Since Kress has been at Southern Gardens, the citrus industry has faced its share of challenges, including multiple hurricanes, citrus canker and citrus greening. Despite these issues, Southern Gardens has heavily invested in the long-term success of the citrus industry. Specifically, Kress discussed Southern Gardens' investments into re-search and a nursery in North Florida. The nursery has the capacity to grow and ship up to 300,000 disease-free trees annually. The nursery will allow Southern Gardens to replant production acreage that was lost due to disease, providing a steady supply of citrus for its processing facility.

After the brief introduction, Kress and Denise Roth, facility leader for juice operations, took the class on a tour. The state-of-the-art technology and the cleanliness of the facility were immediately noticeable. It was fascinating to see how the processing plant is able to capture and market every component of an orange, including the juice, pulp and oils. The remaining material is made into cattle feed. We also got to see the plant's tremendous amount of juice storage capacity: 56 million gallons of not-from-concentrate, and 4 million gallons of concentrate.

As a fellow member of the citrus industry, it is encouraging to see Southern Gardens' commitment to the long-term success of the industry. The company's investment in research and technology will not only help its business, but also the industry as a whole. This type of progressive mindset and leadership is necessary to overcome our current and future challenges.



Jamie Williams, director of Florida farming for Lipman Produce, explains the process of how cherry tomatoes are grown and harvested.

Lipman wants to be synonymous with tomatoes



by Nick Basore
TKM Bengard Farms, LLC

During our South Florida production trip, our class had the opportunity to tour a Lipman Produce tomato farm in Loxahatchee. With about 30 strategically placed locations throughout North America, Lipman Produce is one of America's largest growers of field tomatoes.

Our class met with Jamie Williams, director of Florida farming, and Jason Eppolito, general manager of the Loxahatchee farm. We arrived just as the cherry and grape tomato harvest began. The harvesters work on an individual

basis, striving to collect as many buckets of quality tomatoes as they can. They generally collect three to four buckets an hour and get paid a piece rate. With round tomatoes, a harvester will typically collect 25 to 30 buckets an hour and earn a piece rate per bucket. All harvesters make at least minimum wage, but through piece rate incentives such as these workers typically make much more.

Lipman Produce plants all 52 weeks of the year throughout North America and is proud to be able to provide housing for about 85 percent of its farm workers. Through heavy investment in research and development, Lipman has developed specific proprietary varieties that are bred to be resistant to various diseases such as Fusarium Race 3. A statement by Scott Rush, Lipman's South Lee County Manager, sums up the goal of Lipman's tomato operation: "When you think of bananas, you think Chiquita ... Dole, pineapple. We want to be that way with tomatoes."



Amber Kosinsky of Wish Farms speaks with students at the RCMA center in Belle Glade.

RCMA emphasizes literacy



by Jonathan Allen
R.C. Hatton, Inc.

Last but not least, the final stop on Class 2's South Florida trip was the Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA) Belle Glade center. Founded in 1965, the center provides child care and education to children of farmworker families.

The idea came about when agricultural workers realized that taking children to the fields all day was not suitable. A village of Mennonites near Homestead's Redlands opened two child care facilities. Starting with 75 children in 1965, the RCMA now serves nearly 8,000 children of migrant farmworkers and rural low-income families across Florida with more than 75 locations in 21 counties.

RCMA provides positive educational practices to children starting at a young age, with RCMA employees teaching children through one-on-one interaction. Social skills, literacy and ethics are all part of the RCMA's practices. Over time, RCMA has broadened its spectrum by accepting children as young as 6 weeks old while also providing after-school programs for kids up

to 16. RCMA provides services for adults, helping with literacy and language skills.

The association has developed strong partnerships with Head Start, the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project, Florida's Office of Early Learning, local Early Learning Coalitions, the Mexican Consulates in Orlando and Miami, Florida agriculture, community-based organizations and school districts. The RCMA has proven to be a very successful program with the help of government funding and dedicated employees. Its expansion is continuing throughout Florida and its ability to reach out to lower-income families has flourished.

"In addition to the shirt drive we did for RCMA at our second session we decided to conduct a book drive for the benefit of RCMA as well," said Sonia Tighe. "I am pleased to say that there were so many books we simply could not count them all."

"At RCMA, each book became a precious gift to a child. Managers distributed the books to the five child-care centers in the Plant City area, plus two in Dade City. Together, the seven centers serve about 440 children," said Kathy Vega, RCMA's Plant City area coordinator. "From the centers, the books went home with families."

Literacy is one of RCMA's most fundamental goals, and the books complemented Opening Doors, a series of video-based parenting classes taught at RCMA centers, Vega said.

Generous donations were also given by Scholastic Books, Pearson North America and Universal Promotions.



RCMA teachers gladly accept one of many book deliveries.



Trust, integrity and respect are key



by Carleton Johns
Tater Farms

The final farm on our 2 1/2-day speed-dating tour of South Florida farms delivered us to Grower's Management.

After working with other operations, Paul Orsenigo and David Basore got together and decided to carve out their own piece of agricultural paradise that is in the Everglades Agricultural Area. While they grow the staple crops of sugar cane, sweet corn and rice (in the summer), they seem to have found their niche with specialty salad greens. They grow an exhaustive variety of products including endive, escarole, parsley, cilantro, arugula, radicchio, romaine and iceberg lettuce, a host of baby greens, and seed beds and test plots for new lettuce varieties. Chances are if you've eaten a salad east of the Mississippi in the winter, you've eaten something grown on this farm.

We took a sort of build-your-salad-as-you-walk tour as we munched our way through



Class members watch as Paul Orsenigo gathers baby spinach immediately after it was harvested.

their main leafy green blocks. Orsenigo took us to a block of radicchio, where he candidly explained he doesn't care for the vegetable. But he pointed out it is a very popular, colorful item for salad mixes. We watched them mechanically harvest baby spinach, which was impressive considering how small and fragile the leaves are. This spinach would be on store shelves in two to four days potentially as far west as St. Louis.

Although most of the product on the farm is being sold under some variation of contract, Grower's Management does sell some crops on the open market. Orsenigo noted that the markets are expanding, particularly for niche products. He also spoke of the solid relationships that Grower's Management has earned with its buyers through the years. That trust, integrity and respect are key to surviving tough years when one side or the other may need relief from its commitments. This season, however -- as was the case at most of the farms we visited -- because of weather problems on the West Coast everything green in the field was in high demand.



The class with Paul Orsenigo during their visit to Grower's Management the last day of their South Florida production tour.



Hundley Farms balances efficiency with stewardship



by Ian Bessell
ABC Research Laboratories

During our January production tour of South Florida we had the opportunity to visit a variety of operations including Hundley Farms. John Scott Hundley, vice president of Hundley Farms, and Andy Ballard, 12-year employee and ELDP Class 1 graduate, hosted our class at their farm near Belle Glade. Hundley Farms is a family-owned company since 1969 with operations in both Florida and Georgia. It grows a variety of crops including sweet corn, sugar cane, rice, beans, peanuts, cotton and radishes.

John shared with us some of what it takes to farm in South Florida's organic muck soils near Lake Okeechobee in the Everglades Agricultural Area. The soil is manganese deficient and vulnerable to loss through a process called subsidence caused by oxidation of the organic matter. It was interesting to learn how Hundley Farms and others growers in the region are utilizing BMPs as well as carefully planned crop rotation to help improve the soil and reduce the need for herbicide and pesticide applications.

Hundley Farms is always looking for the latest technology in farming. They use GPS to control the planting of their vegetables and sugar cane to optimize the use of fertilizers and other inputs.

"Through laser leveling, crop rotation, precision fertilizer application and advanced water table management, we have decreased the phosphorus leaving our farm and slowed



John Scott Hundley explains how they use radishes as a rotational crop between sugar cane plantings because of their quick turn-around.

the rate of soil subsidence," Hundley said. "We're ensuring our farm will be sustainable for future generations."

Food safety is a big concern for any grower and Hundley Farms is no exception, the company has always made food safety a priority. It utilizes GAPs along with third-party audits to ensure food safety programs are cutting edge from the fields to the packing facility. During our visit to Pioneer Growers, which packs for Hundley Farms, we had the chance to see the massive packing line used to pack the sweet corn. Hundley is still field-packing some corn but is shifting to using the packing facility. This cutting-edge facility utilizes systems designed to address food safety, traceability and product quality all under one roof. However, it was the large hydro-coolers, with their high volume of chilled water used to remove field heat that were the most impressive pieces of the process to see in action.



The class' next stop will be Tallahassee, where members will tour the capitol and meet with legislators. Look for those stories in the next issue.

Keep reading for updates from our Class 1 Alumni!

ELDP ALUMNI

... updates from Class 1

Rob Atchley of A. Duda & Sons, Inc. has been promoted to location manager for the LaBelle Farm in addition to still being grove manager in Florida and Texas for the company.



Elizabeth Malek's two-month-old daughter, Aliya. Elizabeth says she is smiling every day and can't believe how quickly her time off is passing. She will be back to work soon, but will miss spending the week days with her little one.

Rachel Walters received the Bayer Masters Award for 2012, for exceptional increases in sales over the previous year, representing the Florida district. She was one of only two in the Coastal Region to receive the award.

Justin Roberson was responsible for the installation and implementation of a new 38 lane color sorter for grape and cherry tomatoes this past season. He had the privilege of leading a diverse group of Dutch, Spanish, Creole and English speaking contractors and mechanics through the summer months on a short, and highly regimented, installation schedule - finishing just in time for our fall tomato season. The new production line automates the majority of the grading, sizing and color sorting of specialty tomatoes. The implementation of the new line has been a challenging, yet exciting and rewarding experience for him.



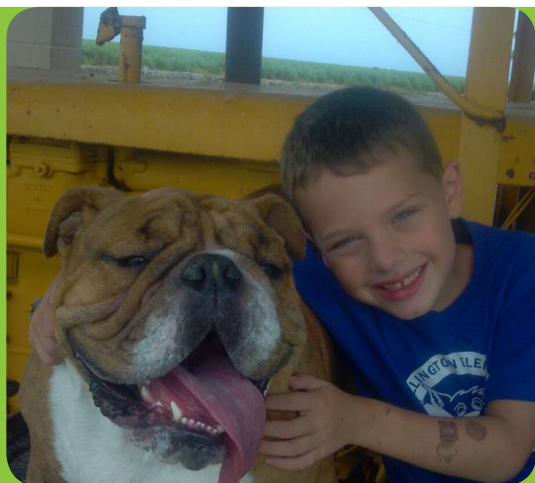
Adam Trott says daughter, Payton, is always doing something adorable (see above). He is also looking forward to being a first-time uncle soon.



April Roe Porter is looking forward to becoming a first-time aunt. Her younger brother and his wife, Geoff and Nicole Roe, will welcome the first member of their fifth generation into the family in late April. Noble Juice just released its newest blend, Pummelo Paradise - the first Pummelo juice beverage in the market.



Michael, Brooke and Trace Hill. Trace is recovering well from his surgery.



Andy Ballard has been very busy this winter harvesting sugar cane and green beans, in addition to planting corn. The warm weather allows Hundley Farms to continuously produce vegetables throughout the winter. While most areas up north are waiting for the warm weather, they are in the height of production.

Andy says, "I regretfully announce the newest addition to our family... a 75-pound slobbering English Bulldog named Mathis. We inherited him via my brother-in-law. My son, Dalton, is in love with him, but he doesn't have the frequent pleasure of wiping up drool! I miss going to the ELDP trips, and am hoping for a reunion in the future. I frequently utilize the knowledge and contacts I gained from the program and hope the new class is enjoying it as much as I did."



Heather Banky is currently trying to keep up with her very active kids! She now has to look up to Magnus, her 12-year-old. Her husband, Mark, just finished coaching him in the LaBelle rec league and they have now shifted to coaching/playing on the LaBelle travel team (they won the championship last year!). Her youngest, Jade, just turned 11 and is looking her in the eye; by next year Heather will be the shortest person in the house. Jade is a budding volleyball player in her first year in rec league play. They both claim Heather is a little too loud on the sidelines - but as an athlete once upon a time it's hard for her not to get fired up watching her kids play their hearts out. She says, "For all of you with little ones, hold them every chance you get!"

Jennifer Hodges recently received responsibility of managing The Andersons Southern Region Internship program. She is also currently taking "Fundamentals of Applied Agronomy," an online course from the American Society of Agronomy.