

EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

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INTRODUCTION: FFVA 101



Pictured above is Class 11 at H&A Farms with Michael Hill and Ryan Atwood.

In November, Class 11 of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program officially kicked off with its first session at FFVA's headquarters in Maitland. During the three-day FFVA 101 session, class members

heard from FFVA staff members and industry experts.

The program featured presentations on labor issues, the challenges of the fresh citrus segment, water policy, marketing and

transportation issues, regulations, and more. To close out the week, the class had the opportunity to tour H&A Farms in Mount Dora and learn about its unique perspective on the blueberry market.

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Leadership legacy and guiding principles



By **Miles Armstrong**
TradeMark Nitrogen

"It is not important what we do, but how we do it."
– Mike Joyner

For everyone involved with FFVA, past and present, we all know that we will continue to have significant challenges ahead of us. We have all chosen to be here, to be in this industry, and to take each of these challenges head on. We could not do this without the support of our leaders who have come before us and those who will come after us. Each member of ELDP Class 11 has been selected by these leaders to be in this program, to be present, to be engaged, to learn and to participate, and we have accepted that challenge.

As this investment has been made in our development as future leaders in this industry, FFVA President Mike Joyner tasked us to define what our leadership guiding principles and legacy will be. Now these will be different for each one of us, but there will certainly be some common themes as we embark on this journey together. Joyner has defined his guiding principles as:

- Always do the right thing.
- Be honest.
- Lead with character.
- Do not associate long hours with hard work.
- Be intentional.
- Teach and mentor those around you.

Each one of these principles should come as no surprise to those who know Joyner. He absolutely embodies every single one of these and more. We will do our best to learn from those who will share their experiences and lessons with us as we become fully immersed in this program and organization. We will also aim to define our own individual legacies so that we can look back and say that what we did was not as important as how we did it.

A voice for Florida's specialty crop industry

Communication is key to maintain open doors for Florida's fresh produce industry amidst issues ranging from unfair trade to disconnected public opinions on food production. The modern age of information exacerbates these challenges as



By **Gracelyn Byrd**
U.S. Sugar

deteriorating trust and interest in traditional media outlets have created new networks of information, faster news cycles, and a new type of information consumer. Florida's producers often find themselves underrepresented in current news cycles which prefer to overemphasize sensational news stories.

FFVA's communications division, led by Christina Morton and Veronica Figueroa, works to promote the voice of Florida producers on critical industry issues in the current news media climate, while keeping members engaged and informed through a variety of popular communication channels including social media, newsletters, and grassroots advocacy.

Additionally, FFVA offers help to members in times of crisis by providing strategies to communicate leadership, care, responsibility, and decisiveness to the media and the public. By building public support for pro-agriculture policy, sharing the fresh produce industry's voice, communicating FFVA's successful efforts and initiatives, promoting the benefits of FFVA membership, and ensuring two-way communication with membership, FFVA keeps Florida's producers in the loop. The invaluable expertise offered by their communications team alleviates pressure experienced by Florida's producers to keep up with the ever-changing world of communications so they can focus on what they do best: feeding America.

You can do your part to support Florida producers and stay up-to-date with industry news by liking and following FFVA on Facebook (@**FloridaFruitandVeg**), Twitter (@**FlaFruitandVeg**), and Instagram (@**FlaFruitandVeg**).





Trade policy continues to hamstring Florida's specialty crop growers



By **Jason Chandler**
Grimmway Farms

Following the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, Florida's specialty crop growers have witnessed the influx of Mexican imports displace domestic production with unfairly priced fruits and vegetables. In our opening session, FFVA President Mike Joyner dissected the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) 2020 report "The Impact of Mexico's Ag Exports on Florida Agriculture." He also provided key highlights on the growing disparity that Florida growers face with our current trade regulations, or the lack there of.

The International Trade Commission had originally predicted Mexican imports to the U.S. would only increase by 3% as a result of opening the border at NAFTA's inception. As U.S. commodity crops, such as corn and soybean, flowed southward across the border, the Mexican government began transitioning their growers to vegetable production by investing \$200 million annually since the early 2000s. These investments drove the acreage of protected agriculture in Mexico from 325 acres in 2003 to an astonishing 126,000 acres by 2018. Current estimates indicate that of Mexico's fruit and vegetable exports, nearly 78% are destined for the U.S. and many land in the same marketing window as Florida producers.

The FDACS report shows that the value of specialty crop imports from Mexico increased by 551% (\$2.3 to \$15.04 billion)

between 2000 and 2019, while Florida's specialty crop cash receipts continued a gradual decline of 44% (\$3.32-\$2.3 billion) over the same period. NAFTA and its successor, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), have provided very little protection for Florida growers, impacting their communities, job creation, and the framework of food security that our country needs.

The underlying theme of this session was that trade is complicated, complex, and cannot be done in a vacuum. Florida's specialty crop growers are investing countless hours and millions of dollars every year to remain competitive in their respective markets. However, as stated by Joyner, "Unless policymakers can come to an agreement on immediate and enforceable solutions, our growers may not get a chance to compete in the future."

Navigating treacherous supply chain waters



By **Leo Camelo**
HM Clause

It's an understatement to characterize the current fresh produce supply chain as challenging. Post-pandemic demand for global goods triggered a massive supply glut, causing shortages and high prices in

transportation, pallets, crates, bins, and other items. It's been a very busy 18 months for Tori Rumenik, who is the commodity services and supply chain manager for FFVA. They have been hard at work with legislators and the produce industry ensuring Florida-grown products ship on time and aren't negatively impacted due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and other issues.

Advocating for Florida growers, Tori and FFVA are addressing supply chain

issues with legislators, and the industry at large. In May 2021, the association sent a letter to the Florida Retail Federation advocating for more flexibility for growers and packers to use shipping pallets that might differ from traditional buyer requirements. In June, it provided comments to the USDA on agriculture supply chain issues. And in October, it provided comments to the USDOT on the state of the transportation industry. In parallel to these efforts, FFVA continues to engage in Hours of Service issues, advocating for legislation that is better suited for agricultural needs. These efforts have so far added necessary flexibility to Hours of Service (HOS) rules, including additional split sleeper berth options and flexibility in the 30-minute break requirement. FFVA continues to advocate for all points in the original petition, including adding an allowance for drivers to rest at any point during their trip without counting this rest time against their HOS allotments, excluding loading and unloading times from the 14-hour on-duty HOS calculations, and lastly, allowing for drivers to complete their trip, regardless of HOS requirements if they come within 150 air miles of their delivery point.

Despite the focus on the supply chain issues, Tori and FFVA continued their work with the commodity exchange groups throughout the pandemic. These groups are working closely with the Fresh From Florida Program as well as on their own marketing campaigns. These efforts continue driving demand for Florida-grown produce.



What's on the horizon for Florida citrus?

For the Florida citrus grower, it has been difficult to stay positive the last 20 years. Citrus acreage in Florida has dropped by an estimated 50% due to canker, HLB and



By **Ben Backus**
DLF Packing

a mass migration into the state. A bright spot during these trying times has been the New Varieties Development and Management Corp. (NVDMC) which was formed in 2005 to work on the grower's behalf to find and license new citrus varieties. This has been a major need in the citrus sector because of the lack of genetic diversification in commercial citrus. Citrus cultivars have been propagated to create uniform trees but has inadvertently created an easy opening for pests and disease (i.e., greening). Variety sources can include universities, USDA and even hobbyist growers. Some of the recently released varieties include US Early Pride Tangerine and Sugar Belle mandarin hybrid.

Serving as the NVDMC executive director would seem like a full-time position all on its own, but it is one of the many hats of Peter Chaires. Chaires also heads up the Florida Citrus Packers and the Citrus Administrative Committee (CAC), which was thrown a major curve ball this fall. Florida's fresh grapefruit season was gearing up for an exceptional year; however, the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Services suspended aspects of the maturity standards required for the importation of fresh fruit allowing a lower standard Mexican grapefruit to be imported into the USA. It is unclear how this exception got passed, but it will affect Florida's grapefruit season and its growers' returns in a negative manner. Peter Chaires and the rest of the FFVA team are hard at work fighting for our members to stop this unfair exemption and restore the regulations set by the CAC and followed closely by the members of the Florida Citrus Packers.



Endangered Species Act could lead to chemical extinctions

It is a safe assumption that many producers have been prevented from utilizing desired products because of label restrictions and seen effective products removed from the market.



By **Dan Kimble**
Harplyn Irrigation

One example of an effective

product that farmers may never have access to again is aldicarb.

On Jan. 12, 2021, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a conditional registration for aldicarb to be utilized for orange and grapefruit crops – seemingly a win for Florida citrus producers. Substantial evidence supported the EPA's conditional registration decision, including evidence that it was unlikely that aldicarb would adversely affect any of Florida's 131 endangered or threatened species.

However, contrary to the recommendations of the EPA and the Florida Pesticide Registration Evaluation Committee, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) denied the application for use of aldicarb on April 21, citing, for the first time ever, failure to abide by requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Adding insult to injury, subsequent to the FDACS announcement the U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit, ordered summary vacatur to the EPA's conditional registration on June 7.

Throughout the aldicarb saga, the EPA has been explicit that it will not provide any reconsideration before 2024, at the earliest. Therefore, for the time being, citrus producers will be left with no recourse when it comes to aldicarb use.

With pesticides being more regulated than pharmaceuticals, Mike Aerts, FFVA vice president and president of Third Party Registrations, Inc., an FFVA subsidiary, is the go-to for FFVA members when it comes to product registration and use. He advises that while Congress will have no appetite for amending the ESA anytime soon, encouraging the EPA to create more reliable ESA evaluations would be the place to start.

Specifically, farmers need the integration of an ESA system that is credible, transparent, protective of species, and legally defensible. Without evidence-based practices, the ESA will cause products that assist farmers in survival, like aldicarb, to go the way of the Dodo.



On the front lines of Florida's agricultural water use

The Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association represents the interests of the agricultural community on policy and regulatory issues at the state



By **Matt Bardin**
Glades Crop Care Inc.

and federal level. Kerry Kates, FFVA's director of water and natural resources, can meticulously walk through Florida's water law and explain it as a hybrid between prior appropriation and riparian systems. He helps growers navigate consumptive use permits and best management practice (BMP) requirements. BMPs and IFAS' fertilizer rates have become a major topic of concern with recommendations turning into requirements and implementation of verification inspections.

Important issues include saltwater intrusion, deteriorating wetlands, and lake levels. Lake Okeechobee is a

particularly important area of discussion when talking about water in South Florida. The Army Corp's decisions on managing the lake are riddled with environmental problems and the potential for water-supply shortages. Kates brought our group up to speed on the need for aquifer storage and recovery that is becoming more common through FDEP's permitting. Where appropriate, it can sequester pollutants and take pressure off water regulation.

A voice in our favor is increasingly needed as agricultural water use has been surpassed by public water use. This shift in use is due to increasing population and development as well as decreasing agricultural land. Kates explained Florida is ahead of the curve on water conservation in agricultural and residential use. The negative perception of agricultural water use needs to be improved with a spotlight on efforts toward conservation in the industry.

Agricultural interests are always having to fight for and justify their water allocations. Kerry Kates and FFVA are on the front lines.

Securing a stable workforce for Florida's fruit, veg producers



By **John Watson**
Florida Foundation
Seed Producers

During the first meeting of the ELDP Class 11, our group received a presentation from Jamie Fussell, FFVA's director of labor relations. Fussell has a lifelong background in Florida agriculture and has worked extensively in the water law/policy field prior to transitioning into his current role with FFVA.

Fussell's presentation concisely identified many of the labor challenges facing Florida's specialty crop producers. Florida producers rely upon access to a stable workforce, but as the availability of domestic labor continues to decline, producers have become more reliant upon the H-2A visa program, which provides temporary or seasonal workers to supplement the domestic workforce.



In the past decade, Florida's utilization of the program has grown nearly 800%, and Florida is now the largest user of the program nationwide.

Fussell's presentation also highlighted

many of the common misconceptions about agricultural labor surrounding wages, working conditions and the availability of a domestic workforce. Fussell offered simple, fact-based messages to dispel each of these misconceptions.

Fussell and his staff offer several services to benefit FFVA's members, including ongoing advocacy with regulatory agencies and educational forums to keep producers abreast of changes to labor policies. Fussell's team also assists FFVA producer members as they prepare and submit applications to the H-2A visa program (fee-based).

On behalf of our class, we are thankful for Jamie Fussell's presentation, which will help each of us become better advocates for Florida's specialty crop industry. We look forward to following FFVA's ongoing efforts to ensure a sustainable workforce for the future.





Specialty crop foundation strengthens community

One of the best traits that organizations have is their community involvement. It is not just about how much money is contributed every year; it is about the lives that have been changed because of the time and money that was spent.



By **Carisa Keller**
Alico Inc.

There are three main focuses of the Florida Specialty Crop Foundation: research, education, and philanthropy. The idea behind this organization is to have long-term sustainability in the specialty crop sector of Florida. When newer crops are hoping to gain more engagement, they look to the foundation to help increase awareness of their product.

Sonia Tighe, the executive director of the foundation, works throughout the year to help raise money to support the Emerging Leader Development Program (ELDP), as well as to identify new talent to participate in the program. This program helps young individuals who work in agriculture see other parts of the industry and learn about the legislation that FFVA goes to

the capital to fight for. To date, there have been 128 participants who have gone through this process.

Foundation beneficiaries include RCMA, and high school and college students through various scholarships. The focus is on enhancing the lives of children in the industry and fostering the next generation.

Additionally, Warner University has received support for its agriculture program. They saw the need to continue to grow the awareness of the industry and wanted to help those who were taking a different approach to it.

Florida Specialty Crop Foundation understands the importance of a strengthened community. It makes me proud to stand behind something that creates a difference!

Grower or not, membership is a must

FFVA membership is an investment in the future of Florida agriculture and a connection to Florida fruit and vegetable farmers, and those that support them. Director



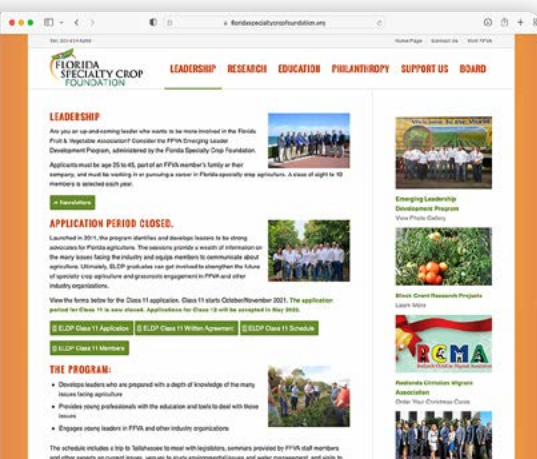
By **Charlie Hurst**
PGIM Real Estate

of Membership Sonia Tighe presented to ELDP Class 11 on the importance and impact of membership with FFVA as a producer or trade associate.

Producer member companies are the lifeblood of the organization and fuel the organization's mission to "enhance the business and competitive environment for producing and marketing fruits, vegetables, and other crops." Producer members benefit from access to all directors, industry advocacy at state and national levels, workforce assistance to ensure compliance with labor laws, regulations and programs, crop protection, third party registrations, crisis communication and planning, water and land use, leadership development and more. Trade member companies all have access to networking, sponsorship, and participation in FFVA's annual convention and events, leadership programs and seats on FFVA committees.

With perspective from both producer and trade members, FFVA committees meet bi-annually to discuss industry issues, trends, and more importantly, take action to mitigate and solve the industry's challenges in food safety and sustainability, production management, research, supply chain management, workforce, advocacy, and water and land uses.

After spending a week with the FFVA directors, our ELDP class understands that this membership comes with tremendous value. The service to those members is unmatched, and as a result, membership continues to grow. Becoming a member is quick and simple with online applications, and with the FFVA app and social media presence, following what's happening in Florida is easier and more important than ever.



Florida tomatoes: An industry on the defensive



By **Jake Rotherth**
Rotherth Farm Inc.

The Florida tomato industry faces relentless and fierce competition from multiple fronts. The Florida agriculture industry is no stranger to cheap imports flowing across the border each season, and Florida tomato growers are no exception. As Florida growers are already dealing with rising costs of production and labor scarcity, tomato imports continue to drive down prices and cut into the bottom line of Florida producers.

This dumping of cheap tomatoes is a direct result of the Mexican government's attempts to modernize its country's farms by providing expansive subsidies to its farmers. This, in combination with severely depressed wages, gives Mexican farmers the ability to sell crops for a price that would typically be under the cost of production for U.S. producers. This is also known as "dumping."

Will the 149-year-old Florida tomato industry be able to survive with this level of unfair competition? Michael Schadler of the Florida Tomato Exchange thinks so. In this time of fierce competition, there is one thing that sets Florida apart: quality. Florida still remains the nation's top producer of fresh market tomatoes for this very reason. Consumers know and trust Florida product - and for good reason, says Schadler. Florida has the highest level of food safety and quality standards, with every level of production, handling and packing subject to



mandatory state audit. Knowing where your food comes from, how it is produced and handled is important says Schadler, and consumers are willing to pay for that piece of mind.

Despite the many challenges it

faces, the Florida tomato industry is here to stay. That being said, the work of Schadler and the Florida Tomato Exchange will continue to be vital to protect one of Florida's most important industries.

A bird's-eye-view of FFVA's structure and operations



By **Chris Meyer**
Corteva Agriscience

Since 1943, FFVA has served the needs of Florida's grower-shipper community by enhancing the business and competitive environment for producing and marketing fruits, vegetables, and other crops. After listening to Director of Finance & Administration Halston Fernandez discuss the high-level organizational and financial structures of FFVA, two things are very clear: 1) FFVA is clearly designed to serve the needs of its members, and

2) FFVA has diverse income streams, meaning FFVA will be able to serve its members long into the future.

FFVA manages three subsidiary companies that further broadens the execution of the association's mission: FFVA-AIM, Inc., Florida East Coast Travel Services, and Third Party Registrations, Inc. FFVA-AIM provides a key source of revenue to the wider FFVA organization, allowing FFVA to weather challenges such as changes in membership, or unforeseen circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The bulk of FFVA itself is comprised of four organizational committees (finance, convention, membership, and political action committees) and seven policy committees (advocacy, food &

sustainability, production management, research, supply chain management, water & land use, and workforce). These various committees are overseen by a board of directors and executive committee and serve as a platform for members to communicate on issues and develop solutions to those problems facing the agricultural industry. In addition to the opportunities and services provided by FFVA, its committees and subsidiaries, FFVA also provides exclusive access to industry newsletters, marketing assistance, crisis management resources and more. Through the Florida Specialty Crop Foundation, members can also take advantage of philanthropy opportunities and leadership development programs.





Family farm leading the industry



By **Chacen Taylor**
Lipman Family Farms

H&A Farms continues to be one of the largest blueberry growers and packers in the Southeast. The Hill and the Atwood families make this achievement possible. As fourth- and first-generation farmers, respectively, both families have come together and diversified their operations by controlling the entire process from growing to shipping.

Michael Hill and Ryan Atwood of H&A Farms led a tour through their operation for Class 11 of the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program. The tour included

the complete process, from growing and harvesting, to packing and shipping. A point of discussion made by Michael Hill was the complications presented in the harvesting process. A portion of their crop is picked using a mechanical harvester, and while the quality of harvest does not supersede that of a crop picked by hand, the mechanical harvester has an important place in the future of blueberry farming to ensure better food safety practices and a more efficient process.

With such a large operation, they strive to meet high-quality standards in order to maintain good relationships with their customers. It was stressed to the group the importance of these high standards when effectively processing up to four million pounds of blueberries from growing to shipping.

The tour also included a stop to one of

H&A's green bean fields that was approaching harvest. Here, we saw the process of bean production, from land prep to picking and packing. Although H&A Farms may not be one of the larger producers of green beans in the state of Florida, this side of production opens the door for crop rotation to ensure the necessary nutrients are replenished back into the soil. This will also allow for the expansion into other markets with the production of new fruit and vegetable crops.

While touring H&A Farms, it was evident that the Hill and the Atwood families continuously strive to meet the high standards they have set for themselves and their farming operation. The title of being one of the largest blueberry growers and packers in the Southeast is not achieved half-heartedly, but through perseverance and dedication.

ELDP News

1 Tony Kalogridis (Class 9) and Caitlin Cozart were wed Oct. 23, 2021.

2 Leigh Ann Wynn (Class 5), of Warner University, was elected president of the Polk County Farm Bureau. She is the first female president of the Polk County Farm Bureau in over 35 years.

3 Ted McAvoy (Class 4) has joined the University of Georgia Extension as a vegetable extension specialist.

4 Sasha (Class 10) and Caleb Burgin welcomed their son Jack Harry Burgin on October 26, 2021. Jack joins big sisters Charlotte and Lucy, born in 2016 and 2020, respectively. The Burgins own Burgin Farms in Wauchula, Florida.

5 Breanna Thompson (Class 8) was promoted to U.S. product manager for Corteva Agriscience's cereals herbicides portfolio.

