

Small Farms & Alternative Enterprises UF-IFAS and FAMU-CAFS Extension Team Program Summary 2005-2013



Photo Credit: UF/IFAS

On behalf of the Cooperative Extension Service faculty and staff from the University of Florida-Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF-IFAS) and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University-College of Agriculture and Food Science (FAMU-CAFS), we want to say THANK YOU for your support! We started this program in 2005, and the past eight years of working with all of you, our community partners, has been a meaningful and positive experience. The objective of this summary is to share with you all a little bit of how we got here, highlight some current programs that might be of interest to you, and serve as a milestone for our program so far.

The UF-IFAS and FAMU-CAFS Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Extension team develops small farm educational programs for small to mid-sized farm operators to ensure their farms remain vital to Florida's communities in a way that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. Programs are delivered in a variety of formats, including our website (smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu), field days, workshops, webinars, and hands-on intensive short courses in county extension offices, regional programs, and an annual statewide conference held in Kissimmee, FL each August.

We can deliver exceptional programs at no or very low cost to our farmers because of the generous support from nearly 50 local, state, national and federal sponsors. In the past eight years, we have received funding of

over \$750,000 in the form of competitive grants and in-kind and cash contributions from our community partners.

History

State of Florida Legislative Budget Initiative 2005. The Small Farms & Alternative Enterprises Focus Team received a \$200,000 grant from the state to use for an In-Service Study Tour for small farms, pesticide safety equipment training kits, small livestock equipment training kits, drip irrigation equipment training kits, (each kit was duplicated and made available to 4 regions of the state through a regional extension agent), developed and supported regional small farmer conferences, and mini grants were awarded to ten county faculty to conduct special educational demonstrations in their counties for field days, etc. Through the mini grant process, infrastructure was developed for outreach at 5 locations (Jay, Live Oak, Macclenny, Sarasota, and Homestead).

Small Farms Study Tour (SFST) in-service training was provided to improve the quality of research and education for diversified agricultural systems clientele, including small farms. Twenty UF-IFAS and FAMU faculty from diverse disciplines and counties participated in a week-long in-service training tour of 24 successful southeastern small farms.

Tours of innovative and diversified small farms (Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina SF) were chosen as a method to demonstrate desirable and relevant ideas to agents that could be integrated into Florida small farm systems. The influence and role of extension education, government, and industry infrastructure on the success of small farms was discussed after each small farm interview. Faculty identified specific problems, proposed short and long-term solutions, and expanded the dialog to include the current and future needs of extension programming for Florida small farms.

As a result of the SFST, characteristics of successful small farms as well as their common constraints were documented. These characteristics included the interaction between the producer, extension educators, the regulatory environment and other infrastructure challenges. The following came out of this process:

- *The Team decided to conduct a Small Farms Conference offered on a state-wide basis.*
- *The Team planned to conduct new small farms educational programs in their county as well as regionally.*
- *Faculty planned to continue the educational model of “learning by doing” by continuing to be in contact with each other and communicating reciprocally with hosting agents and small farms from the study tour.*

Economic Contributions of Small Farms in Florida. The preliminary report by Alan W. Hodges, University of Florida, Food & Resource Economics Department shows the results of the evaluation of the total economic contributions of small farms in the state of Florida. Dr. Hodges used data from a UF-IFAS

survey of 304 farms conducted in 2008 (Gaul et al., 2009, report available at www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc088), together with information from the U.S. Census of Agriculture (2007), and a regional economic model constructed with the Implan system. Total sales reported by survey respondents with small farms were \$8.23 million dollars for 40 different agricultural commodities or services. The largest commodity reported was small fruits, representing 16.8 percent of total sales, followed closely by cattle (16.7%), field-grown vegetables (14.8%) and other specialty crops (11.5%). According to the Census of Agriculture for 2007, total sales by small farms in Florida (defined as having annual sales of less than \$250,000) were estimated at \$765.2 million.

Total output impacts were \$1.75 billion, value added contribution to GDP was \$925 million, and total employment impacts were 16,886 jobs.

County, Regional & Statewide Programming

COUNTY TRAININGS

County Extension Agents provide educational opportunities for farmers through hands-on workshops. They cover the following topics:

- *Business and Financial Planning (Annie's Project, Enterprise Budgets)*
- *Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)*
- *Farmers' Markets (Market Rules, Insurance)*
- *Regulatory Compliance (Building Your Farm's Food Safety Plan; Direct Marketing/Cottage Food)*
- *Production (Irrigation School, IPM, Variety Trial Results, Postharvest Handling, Organic)*
- *Marketing (FL Market Maker/Florida Food Connect, Farmer's Market Manager Training, Social Media)*
- *Distribution (Various Food Systems Programs)*
- *Livestock and Forages (Large and Small)*
- *Specialty Crops Production (Agronomics, Flowers & Foliage, Fruits & Nuts, Herbs, Hydroponics, Aquaponics, Vegetables, etc.)*
- *Forest Products (Forestry, Tourism, Wildlife & Hunting)*
- *Freshwater Aquaculture & Farm Ponds (Weed Management, Fish Production, Pond & Lakefront Revegetation, etc.)*
- *Alternative Enterprises (Beekeeping, Cane Syrup, Mushrooms, Renewable Energy, Worms, etc.)*

Food Safety: Recent food safety legislation has created a demand for farm food safety training. Most small farms do not have the financial capacity to hire personnel to develop and implement these plans and asked for help from Extension Agents to develop farm food safety plans.

This program was initially developed and implemented by county agents in the Suwannee Valley to help a very diverse group of fruit and vegetable growers to develop a manual and prepare for a third party food safety audit.

A total of 14 workshops to 185 producers and packers were offered in the last 2 years. In 2012, 31 county agents and program assistants were given formal agent training to deliver “Build Your Own Food Safety Manual” workshops. In addition, some agents attended Farm Food Safety classes at public farmer trainings bringing the total number of agents trained to 52. Our 40 member team delivered six trainings statewide involving 50 farmers (plus one food safety audit preparatory workshop attended by 24 farmers at SFAE conference in Kissimmee). Both agents and farm workers confirmed in formal evaluations an increase in knowledge and skills due to participation in these trainings.



Photo Credit: <http://wellnicity.com/news/article/187-check-your-steps/>



Photo Credit: UF/IFAS

The training included, but was not limited to:

- *Status of the Food Safety Modernization Act*
- *Site selection*
- *Fertilizer and water usage*
- *Field sanitation*

Most of the farmers trained indicated that they plan to have some type of audit conducted, and several indicated they plan to have a fee-based audit, such as a third party, customer, or regulatory audit. Based on an industry food safety consultant’s quote, the charge for preparing a farm typical of the ones owned by the training participants for a fee-based audit was estimated at \$8,000 to \$10,000. Even at the lower figure, the food safety trainings provided a savings of at least \$160,000 to 20 farmers who were confident they could complete the plan on their own after the trainings and prepare for the audit.

REGIONAL TRAININGS

AGRItunity is a regional farm conference and trade show featuring the most current useful information available for farmers and ranchers - large and small. It is a collaborative effort of the UF/IFAS Extension Offices in Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Pasco and Sumter counties. The conference takes place each year in January at the West Central Florida Agricultural Education Center (Sumter County Fairgrounds) in Bushnell, Florida. The event features educational programs, vendors, livestock and crop workshops, and a session speaker.

Gulf Coast Agribusiness Conference: The University of Florida, Santa Rosa County Extension Service and Team Santa Rosa held its 2012 Gulf Coast Agribusiness Conference on February 16 at the Chumuckla's Farmers' Opry House. This conference addresses the challenges and concerns of family farms and provides area farmers with ideas for new crops and business models. Conference topics included "Fruit Orchard Management," "Cottage Food Laws," "Small Ruminant Production," "Timber/Silvo Pasture," "Hydroponic Growing Systems," and "Weed Management for Newly Acquired Land."

Small Farms Working Groups: Extension agents and small farmers met to form a working group to build a community network of farmer to farmer support for Small Farms called the *Northeast Florida Small Farms Working Group*. All producers, regardless of their varied and unique operations are included. The intended audience is the small farmer who wants to develop a regional network of enterprises, and also for beginning farmers. An information network, collaboration with the Extension Service, and a more unified voice for agricultural production, (regardless of commodity size) is envisioned. Practical, applied, hands-on methods in production information, marketing, processing, dealing with regulatory issues and other priority items were identified by the group.

Small farmers in Southwest Florida can network about diversified and sustainable farming systems through the *Southwest Florida Small Farmers Network* which includes growers in the region from Hillsborough to Collier County. This farmer group is facilitated by the county UF/IFAS Agriculture Extension Agents of Sarasota, Lee, and Collier counties. The goal is education to meet small farmer-identified priorities, issues, and needs with farmer-to-farmer contact and extension resources. The format of the meetings is a farm visit that provides a farmer-led walk and description of the farm operations in conjunction with extension presentations on topics preselected by the membership. Additional activities include a growers meeting, pot-luck lunch and seed swap.

STATEWIDE TRAININGS

Small Farms & Alternative Enterprises Conference: Initiated in 2009 with partial funds provided by a Specialty Crop Block Grant to help build capacity of Florida specialty crop small farm operators by providing farmers with up-to-date, research-based, in-depth educational information, the Florida Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises (FL SFAE) Conference has been an ongoing success for five consecutive years. The 1st FL SFAE Conference was held August 1 & 2, 2009 in Kissimmee, FL and hosted by UF-IFAS and FAMU/CAFS.

Over the past 5 years, we have educated nearly 2,400 individuals from 60 counties in Florida, 35 states, and 6 countries. Each year, a majority of attendees are current or prospective farmers. 85%-90% of attendees on average reported knowledge gain and said they planned on applying this new knowledge to their farm or operation.



Photo Credit: [kingdom.ifas.ufl.edu/~tylerljones/UFEVENTS/SmallFarmsConference080213/Saturday/Hi Res Downloads/](http://kingdom.ifas.ufl.edu/~tylerljones/UFEVENTS/SmallFarmsConference080213/Saturday/HiResDownloads/)

The 5th annual FL SFAE Conference was held at the Osceola Heritage Park in Kissimmee, Florida on August 2-4, 2013. The conference welcomed nearly 650 total attendees, conducted 2 pre-conference farm tours (Livestock Tour and a Fruit & Vegetable Tour), presented 30 educational sessions with over 69 speakers and moderators, hosted 72 exhibits, displayed 14 Extension agent educational posters and 5 live animal educational exhibits, served a great diversity of delicious food from Florida small farms, and recognized three Innovative Small Farms.



Educational Sessions Included the Following Topics (and more!)

- *Beginning Farmer and Rancher*
- *Using Social Networking & the Internet to Market Your Product*

- *Grafting Vegetable Transplants*
- *Seed Saving, Production and Availability*
- *Food Safety*
- *Creative Resourcing and Financing*
- *Horticulture*
- *Hydroponics*
- *Livestock*
- *Blackberry Production*
- *Organic and Sustainable Farming*
- *Update on New Poultry Rules*
- *The Business of Farming*
- *Permaculture*
- *A Chef's Perspective of Market Opportunities*

High-profile chefs from around the state cooked fresh, locally-farmed foods as people are more and more interested in food produced or raised by farmers they can meet and get to know. Attendees enjoyed networking at the Saturday evening social with many new and old acquaintances. The event is providing an opportunity to build a small farms industry and improve the lives of hundreds of Florida farm families.

As we plan the 2014 Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference, we take into consideration the feedback we received from past attendees. We continue to strive to improve the learning experience so farmers can implement new ideas on their farms that will make a positive difference in achieving the goals of their farming operations.

Small Farms Academy: Since 2010, the Small Farms Academy (SFA) has been providing unique, hands-on intensive workshops and field days to small farmers on specific topics in order to sustain existing small farms and increase the number of new small farms. The SFA has created 24 new programs in 14 locations throughout the state of Florida serving a total of 1,090 attendees from 2010 through October 2013.

SFA programs today are often offered at the Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center (SVAEC) site near Live Oak due to the established training and demonstration areas such as hydroponic greenhouses, a mixed fruit orchard, an integrated pest management field laboratory, and a mushroom production area. Certain SFA programs are now also offered in other locations in the state based on the ability of the local Extension faculty to host the hands-on component of the programs. The motto of the SFA is "Helping small farm producers prosper through education, networking and adaptive research." The objectives of the SFA include:

- *Train small farmers by providing non-biased scientific information.*
- *Sustain existing small farms and increase the number of new small farms.*
- *Support an increase in the number of socially disadvantaged small farm operators.*
- *Prepare young people to enter agriculture through small farms.*

SMALL FARMS ACADEMY

The first UF Small Farms Academy program was offered at the Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center with the title “Starting a Successful Hydroponic Business”. Many farmers are attracted to growing hydroponically because they have limited land and equipment, and virtually no traditional farming experience. The two day classes featured hands-on activities inside the greenhouses and other structures at the Center. Post course surveys showed participants rated the value very high and greatly appreciated the unique hands-on teaching approach, even though the course is expensive (about \$300). The participants requested additional classes covering advanced topics be offered and also for Extension to develop a social networking tool for participants and both have now been implemented.



Photo Credit: <http://www.localharvest.org/vertical-horizon-farm-M53272>

As a result of this program, there is increased availability of locally grown hydroponic produce throughout Florida. One specific success was the initiation of Vertical Horizon Farms in Hobe Sound, FL by Natalie Parkell and Kevin Osburn. This couple attended the early SFA hydroponic short courses and developed their farm after attending these courses. Now Vertical Horizon Farm serves as a second site of the “Starting a Successful Hydroponic Business” courses and Natalie and Kevin help teach the sessions.

Using Technology to Advance Learning

Small Farms & Alternative Enterprises Website (<http://smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu/>): The website is developed and maintained by a team of Cooperative Extension Service faculty of the University of Florida and Florida A&M University. The site has become very popular since it was launched in 2005, reaching over two million hits in 2011. Many small farm meeting evaluations indicate attendees use the website regularly and find educational programs through the site’s events calendar.

Small farmers and allied organizations have identified critical issues facing small farms such as access to profitable markets, business skills development, accessible technical information, and alternative crops and enterprises. The Small Farms team provides this website so farmers can find commonly needed information from "getting started" to "evaluating an alternative enterprise", to "finding a market", all in one place on the web.

Virtual Field Day Website (<http://vfd.ifas.ufl.edu/>): This website allows visitors to see first-hand new crops and alternative enterprises featured at field days & workshops.

EDIS Publications (<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>): EDIS is the Electronic Data Information Source of UF/IFAS Extension, a collection of information on topics relevant to farmers and many others.

Social Media

- Conference Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/FL.SFAEC>)
- Small Farms Academy Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/smallfarmsacademy>)
- Florida Small Farms Hydroponics Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/floridasmallfarmshydroponics>)

Awards

- **2012 Search for Excellence Award in the area of Farm Health and Safety:** The National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) recognized a team of our Florida County Extension Agents including Robert Hochmuth, Linda Landrum, Elena Toro, and Dan Fenneman at the NACAA Annual Meeting. The team received the award for “Teaching Farmers How to Build Their Own Food Safety Manual”.
- **2012 The Epsilon Sigma Phi Florida Chapter Awardees for Team Recognition** went to our Small Farms committee members: Robert Hochmuth and Susan Kelly for the Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference.
- **2010 Sustainable Florida Best Practice Award Finalist:** Small Farms and Alternative Enterprise Extension Focus Team under the category of Business Partnership. The finalists for The Collins Center Best Practice Award make a difference through a variety of initiatives, including educational programs serving small to mid-size farmers.
- **2010 Epsilon Sigma Phi, Extension Team Recognition:** Agritunity – Regional Small Farms Conference.
- **2007 University of Florida/IFAS Image Awards:** Silver Category, Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Web Site.
- **2007 University of Florida/IFAS Image Awards:** Silver Category, Virtual Field Day Website-Hydroponics.
- **2006 University of Florida/IFAS Image Awards:** Gold Category, Agritunity. Small Farms Conference.
- **2005 University of Florida/IFAS, James App Outstanding Extension Team Award:** Small Farms/ Alternative Enterprises Focus Team (Co-Leader of Team).

Living IPM Field Lab in Live Oak: *The NRCS Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Workshop* organized by Robert Hochmuth, Steve Boetger & Norm Leppla was hosted at the Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center April 30th –May1st. All 24 participants received a comprehensive notebook, containing selected

references on farmscaping, NRCS IPM policies, trap cropping, cover crops, cropping systems, and weed management. UF/IFAS Extension faculty gained a better appreciation of NRCS programs.



Photo Credit: UF/IFAS

The Living IPM Lab County Extension Agent In-service Training conducted by Robert Hochmuth and Carolyn Saft on May 14-15 was attended by 21 agents. Knowledge gained increased from 70% pre-test to 82% post-test. There was very high appreciation for the quality of the training and the educational materials provided along with high aspirations on the part of the agents to implement this topic training back in their counties.

4-H Bug Out Day Camp was led by Carolyn Saft, Brian Estevez, and Bob Hochmuth. Campers gained knowledge about helping pollinating and beneficial insects, which insects are good for crops, and how insects use pheromones to help them work together.

Sunbelt Ag Expo UF/IFAS: In Moultrie, GA (Oct 16-18), over 15,000 individuals visited the IFAS Exhibition Building with at least 500 quality contacts at the IPM booth. The theme was Small Farms - Big Opportunities. Success was mainly attributable to having interesting and interactive exhibits as well as professional, friendly, and enthusiastic faculty and staff managing the exhibits. The evaluation summary showed 100% of the 115 attendees responding indicated “Yes” they had learned something new.

Below are just a few of the educational exhibit display titles at the Expo:

- Hydroponic Systems and Crops
- Bees, More than Just Honey
- Organic and Sustainable Farming
- Alternative and Emerging Fruit Crops in Florida

For More Information Contact:

Danielle Treadwell
Associate Professor
Department of Horticultural Sciences
352-273-4775
ddtreadw@ufl.edu

Bob Hochmuth
Multi County Extension Agent and Small Farms Statewide
Coordinator
386-362-1725
bobhoch@ufl.edu