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About this Newsletter

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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Florida Department of Health
Florida Department of Community Affairs
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The following cities and towns:
Alachua, Bell, Chiefland, Fanning Springs, High Springs, Lake City, Live Oak, Newberry, Starke, Trenton, White Springs
Adopt-A-River
Santa Fe Springs Working Group
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Farmer's Spotlight: Donell Gwinn, Gwinn Brother's Farms



Donell Gwinn of Gwinn Brothers' Farm

DONELL GWINN and his brother, Robert, grew up in the farming business. Their love for the outdoors and their willingness to try new technologies has made them role models in the farming community. The Gwinn brothers produce peanuts, iron clay peas, watermelon, bahiagrass seed, hay and beef cattle on their 1,137-acre farm located in Suwannee County. Donell is one of eight farmers recently chosen to represent the cooperation between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and farmers in NRCS's nationwide campaign, "Conservation — Our Purpose, Our Passion."

By following best management practices (BMPs) and an NRCS conservation plan

developed for their farm, the Gwinn Brothers have been able to improve water quality, enhance water quantity, reduce soil erosion, improve animal and plant health, and enhance wildlife habitat on their farm.

Donell Gwinn's farm is one of the progressive farm demonstrations sponsored by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). Donell has implemented many practices to reduce on farm water use and protect water quality. He reduced water and fertilizer use by changing from overhead irrigation to drip irrigation and by using plastic mulch in his watermelon fields. In addition, the farm's center pivot irrigations systems are retrofitted with water efficient spray nozzles and are calibrated for uniformity. Donell also uses sophisticated soil moisture probes and computer systems to monitor soil conditions and make irrigation decisions. In addition, Donell uses sap testing meters to test the nutrient levels in plant tissues. The practice enables him to determine plant nutrient levels and adjust fertilizer applications for maximum fertilizer efficiency. Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are installed on his tractors

to allow precision nutrient and pesticide applications which saves money and protects the environment.

When asked about his commitment to conservation, Donell responded, "My passion is just built in me. I just like taking caring of things, taking good care of the land, water and wildlife. I really care about keeping it right." Donell's recent recognitions includes the Commissioner's Agricultural-Environmental Leadership Award from FDACS, the Florida Farm

"If we are going to keep making food in this country, we have to educate some young farmers."

—Donell Gwinn

Bureau's County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, and Farmer of the Year from the Suwannee County Soil and Water Conservation District. Gwinn Brother's farm is a fine example of innovation and technology and a model for young farmers to follow. According to Donell, "If we are going to keep making food in this country, we have to educate our young farmers."

2008 Crop Management and BMP School

PRODUCERS FROM Gilchrist, Levy, Lafayette, Columbia, Marion, Madison, Suwannee and Union counties attended crop management workshops facilitated by UF/IFAS Extension faculty and the Suwannee River Partnership. The January workshops covered on-farm economics of irrigation and fertilizer, soil fertility, fertilizer review, plant nutrition, drought conditions and water quality in the

Suwannee River basin. In addition, there was a field demonstration of a diesel engine power unit efficiency test. One class participant got so much out of the class that he offered to sponsor this workshop in his home county so his peers could get the knowledge he did. Close to 100 producers attended the two area school locations in Gilchrist and Suwannee counties.

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Diversified Agri-System Initiative

A PORTION of monies from a State of Florida Legislative Budget Initiative to UF/IFAS in 2006-2007 was used for the Small Farms and Alternative Enterprise program to purchase educational toolkits for teaching, field use and demonstrations



UF/IFAS Extension agents examine contents of educational tool kits.

available through county extension agents. During the regional Suwannee Valley Team planning meeting, extension agents took time to review and try out materials in the toolkits.

The pesticide safety toolkit included hazmat materials, spill clean up supplies and personal protection equipment. Extension agents also have access to an irrigation toolbox and small livestock care toolbox. Supplies are being used at field days, demonstrations and fairs to help producers better understand the various procedures and practices. The funding allowed for the toolkit sets to be provided to four key locations in the state.

The irrigation toolbox is also used to educate homeowners on how to make their home landscapes more water efficient. One class participant said, "I had read about how to install micro-irrigation but was always hesitant about trying to do it myself. After



Bob Hochmuth, UF/IFAS Small Farms State Coordinator, demonstrates materials in irrigation tool kit.

seeing these irrigation parts in person and putting the pieces together myself, I am going to install a micro-irrigation system in my yard next weekend." Research indicates that most of us learn by doing. These toolkits allow for class participation and a positive learning experience.

Suwannee River Water Management District Declares a Phase II Water Shortage

MANDATORY RESTRICTIONS on all categories of water use, including agricultural, will take effect on April 7 throughout the counties covered by the Suwannee River Water Management District.

In January, the district governing board, for the first time in the agency's history, declared a Phase II Water Shortage. The board took the unprecedented action in response to historically low groundwater levels caused by the current drought, and in anticipation of a dry season forecasters predict will last through spring.

As of Jan. 31, the district's 12-month rainfall deficit was 15.25 inches. Groundwater levels monitored in 89 wells in January remained extremely low. Forty-five wells set new December lows, and 5 wells set new historic lows. The district governing board issued 17 emergency permits for dry wells in January, for a total of 174 issued between April 1 and Jan. 31.

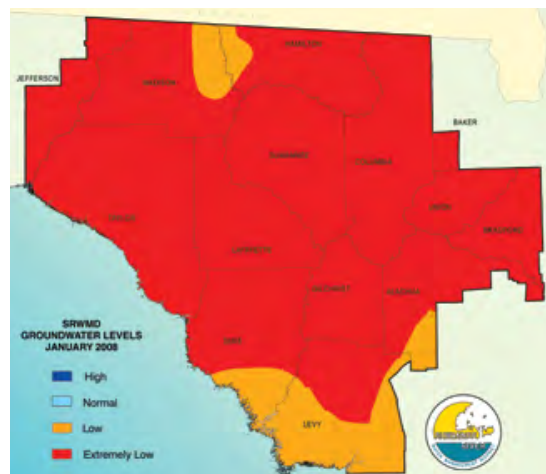
The water shortage order calls for mandatory curbs on agricultural,

residential, commercial and industrial water use, but also allows certain exemptions within each use category. The restrictions will be formally adopted by the governing board at its meeting on March 11 in Live Oak, and will be posted on the district's Web site at www.mysuwanneeriver.com prior to their effective date.

Early this year, district officials held workshops for farmers, large industrial and commercial operations, and local municipalities, to outline the proposed restrictions for each water-use category and to address questions or concerns.

Addressing a large audience of farmers, David Still, recently appointed to the executive director position, commended the region's growers and producers for their stewardship efforts and involvement with the Suwannee River Partnership. He noted that many farmers already have retrofitted

their irrigation systems to achieve higher efficiency, thereby conserving water. He assured the group that the district will continue to work with the agriculture community to develop cost-effective water conservation measures and related best management practices.



Drought conditions in the Suwannee River Water Management District.

Is Agritourism Right for Your Farm?

WITH THE COST of fuel, labor and other inputs rising at a steady rate, many producers are struggling to make a profit in today's global economy. One way to make farms more profitable, as demonstrated by many farms across the US, is tourism, specifically agritourism. What you do on the farm may seem routine to you but could be a fascinating experience a tourist would be willing to pay for.

The number of nonresident tourists who visited our state in 2006 was 83.9 million, in addition to the 12.9 million Florida residents who chose to vacation in Florida. For the northeast region, which stretches from Leon County to Union County, 89% of visitors were in cars. According to the 2006 Florida Visitor Study done by VISITFLORIDA, 31% of these visitors were families with 1/3 of all destinations being state or national parks and historic sites. These tourists visited most frequently during winter and spring, a perfect time to see our agricultural industry in action.

Agritourism, also called agritainment, is not new. In the late 1800's, many city

and the desire to find education as well as entertainment when vacationing.

Some benefits from agritourism are:

- Diversification of farming operations which can add additional income and reduce single enterprise risk.
- Drawing customers to the farm, getting them to stay longer, spending additional dollars for other activities/products such as hayrides or shopping at a farm store.
- Stabilization of the agricultural industry in the area.
- Support of rural communities and businesses by bringing in outside dollars which can be kept within the community.
- An excellent opportunity to tell the "farming story" to the voting public.

Examples of agritainment are corn mazes, pumpkin patches, u-pick fruit or vegetable farms, farm tours and working stays, kayaking businesses, horseback riding, bird watching tours, wineries, and farm stands. To attract more tourists to your area, you may want to join with other



Corn maze at Long & Scott Farm.



Guided tours with Kayak Amelia.

dwellers escaped to family farms to get away from the heat and increasing pace of life in rapidly developing cities. A similar thing happened after WWII when soldiers and their families were looking to visit rural areas for a change of scenery or recreation such as horseback riding. Over the last few years, one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry has been agritourism. Most experts feel this may be due to several factors: fond memories of grandparents' farms; relief from our complicated and fast-paced society; quest for a safe, family-friendly environment;

producers, ranchers and local innkeepers to offer packaged tours of several operations and other rural activities. Help make the northeast Florida region an exciting and educational agritourism destination.

For more information, go to UF/IFAS's Small Farms Web site at smallfarms.ifas.ufl.edu. Click the Tourism tab on the left. Mark your calendars for March 31 and plan to attend "Cultivating Agritourism: How Farmers, Ranchers and Tourism Professionals Plant Seeds for Profit." Contact Linda Landrum (386) 362-1725 ext. 105.

Dates to Remember

- Mar. 21 Pest Control Operator Training**
Pesticide Education and Certification—CEUs in CORE, Commercial L&O, Limited L&O, Termite and Commercial GHP
8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Clay County Extension Office, Green Cove Springs, FL. Contact: Christine Marsh (904) 284-6355
- Mar. 26 - Suwannee County Fair**
Apr. 5 & Livestock Show
Live Oak, FL. Contact (386) 362-2771
- Mar. 29 South Central Florida Small Farms Conference**
Manatee County Extension Office, Palmetto, FL. For more information, contact: Christa Carlson at (941) 722-4524
- Apr. 5 Pasture Management Basics Field Day**
North Florida Research and Education Center - Suwannee Valley, Live Oak, FL. To register, call Karen Hancock at (386) 362-1725 ext. 101 or Elena Toro at (386) 752-5384
- Apr. 8 Cultivating Agritourism: How Farmers, Ranchers, and Tourism Professionals Plant Seeds for Profit**
Gainesville, FL. For more information, contact Karen Hancock at (386) 362-1725 ext. 101 or email khancock@ufl.edu
- Apr. 11-19 2008 Bradford County Fair**
Starke, FL. Contact (904) 966-6224
- Apr. 30 - 2008 57th Annual Florida Beef Cattle May 2 Short Course**
Hilton University of Florida Conference Center, Gainesville, FL. For more information, please visit the Web site at animal.ufl.edu/extension/beef/short.shtml
- May 6 Drip Irrigation & Nutrient Management for Small Farms**
Field Demonstration Tour, Bradford County. Contact Jim DeValerio (904) 966-6224
- May 9-10 Small Scale Dairy Short Course**
Suwannee County Extension. Contact Mary Sowerby (386) 362-2771 or Elena Toro (386) 752-5384