

Suwannee River Basin Farmers Honored for Environmental Stewardship

submitted by Holly Stalvey

Twenty-nine north Florida farmers were honored guests at the 8th annual CARES supper and celebration held at Dwight Stansel Farm and Nursery in Live Oak, Florida on July 1. An estimated 800 attendees gathered to recognize the positive efforts being made to protect and conserve water in north Florida.



Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles Bronson address the crowd.



Commissioner Charles Bronson and Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick present Norman Otis of Madison, FL with a CARES plaque.

CARES (County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship) is a program developed by the Suwannee River Partnership and Florida Farm Bureau to promote sound environmental and agricultural practices that help save water, prevent pollution and conserve energy.

State Representative Debbie Boyd hosted the event. Guest speakers included Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Charles Bronson, USDA Undersecretary Gale A. Buchanan, Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick, Dean and Director for the Florida Extension Service Larry Arrington, and State Conservationist Carlos Suarez.

The CARES program encourages farmers to implement best management practices (BMPs) on their farms and operations. BMPs are practical, economically feasible actions that agricultural producers can take to reduce the amount of fertilizers, animal waste and other pollutants entering the area's water resources. These practices benefit both the environment and the farmer.

Buchanan stated that BMPs are a winning proposition for all involved because farmers are able to save money while also using less chemicals and water, crucial aspects in protecting the water resources.

Since the program's inception in 1999, the Partnership has managed to achieve exceptionally high participation rates. Currently, 90 percent of dairies, 99 percent of poultry farms and 70 percent of row crop farms are participating in the program and helping protect the environment.

"Farmers are the first environmentalists," Hoblick said in response to participation rates in the program.

Through BMPs, farmers are saving an average of one billion gallons of water each



Lafayette County FFA members joined in on the fun and served guests in the serving line.

crop season and using approximately half the amount of fertilizers they were using before.

Over the nine-year period, more than 330 farmers have made investments in infrastructure and practices designed to benefit the environment. These farmers have committed to protect the area's water resources and have voluntarily agreed to install and manage BMPs on their farms.

The Suwannee River Partnership is a group of 63 local, state and federal

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Community Leaders Form Partnership for Springs' Protection



Community leaders in Lake City and Columbia County have joined forces to tackle local water quality issues with renewed vigor, focus and coordination through a newly formed coalition, The Ichetucknee Partnership (TIP).

The Lake City/Columbia County Chamber of Commerce presided over the official launch of TIP at a celebration at the Hampton Inn and Suites in Lake City.

Approximately 60 invited guests attended the event, where they learned of TIP's mission to promote the environmental and

economic well-being of the Ichetucknee Springshed through locally led, voluntary, incentive-based programs.

The Ichetucknee River and springs are world renowned for their unparalleled beauty and recreational opportunities. Ichetucknee Springs State Park draws nearly a quarter-million visitors each year, and the total estimated economic benefits generated by the river and springs exceed \$23 million annually.

Following a viewing of "The Springs Heartland," an inspiring short film about north Florida's springs produced by Wes Skiles and Karst Productions, Chamber President Georgia Jones presented an overview of TIP's purpose and plans.

"Rapid development in Columbia County has created a need for more local coordination and leadership in protecting the water resources within the Ichetucknee springshed," Jones explained.

Praising the Ichetucknee Springs Basin Working Group and others whose hard

work has laid the foundation for springs protection, Jones said local leaders believe the best way now to move forward is to coordinate the available financial, scientific, human and political resources under one locally led partnership.

The Suwannee River Partnership, Columbia County Board of Commissioners, Lake City City Council, Lake City Rotary, Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) and Fort White Town Council have joined the Chamber in signing a memorandum of agreement in support of TIP. Other agencies and interest groups will be invited and encouraged to sign similar agreements.

As Chamber president, Jones also will serve as chairperson for TIP's executive committee, which will set the course for the group and develop a three-year action plan. Jones also serves on the SRWMD governing board.

Other executive committee members at present are Dale Williams, Columbia

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agencies and other participating members dedicated to improving water quality and strengthening agriculture in North Florida. For more information about CARES or the Suwannee River Partnership, visit www.suwannee.org.



Commissioner Charles Bronson and Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick present Scott and Iris Wynn of Jennings, FL with a CARES plaque.

2008 Cares Recipients

Madison County

Dewayne and Kevin Leslie
Charles and Michael Roland
Willie and Bo Agner
Neal Baer
Joe Sherrard
Arthur Burkett
Marian Ramsey
Myles McNierney
Napoleon Honeywell
Norman Otis
Phillip, Dale, and Chuck Hackle
Wayne Lane
Jerry Herring

Suwannee County

Erwin Stansel
Michael Boatright
Ryan and Reed Moore
Hal Land
Randall and Pam Dasher

Hamilton County

Scott and Iris Wynn
Joe Mathis
Clevie and Luke Selph
Harrell Reid

Robert Culbreath

Jefferson County

John Mac Finlayson
Allen and Cissy Boyd
Herbert and Linda Demott

Lafayette County

Everett Kerby
Scott McAdams & Eddie Fredrickson
JW, Earl, Paul, & Jack Byrd



CARES recipients stand as they wait to receive their award and recognition.

County administrator; Scott Reynolds, Lake City city manager; John Wheeler, Lake City Rotary's Ichetucknee Promise coordinator; David Still, Suwannee River Water Management District executive director; and Larry Arrington, Suwannee River Partnership chair.

Initial funding for the TIP program will be provided by the SRWMD, which has pledged a total of up to \$750,000 for approved projects during the first three years.

TIP is working closely with Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) to promote springs-friendly landscaping practices in Columbia and Suwannee

counties. FYN is a program of the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences (IFAS). The SRWMD has provided a \$35,000 grant to FYN to help with its local efforts.

Subcommittees on education and outreach, research and monitoring, and best management practices will help develop specific plans and make recommendations on ways to increase public awareness of the effect of human activities on water quality; to improve management of nutrients from animal waste, septic tanks and fertilizers; and to improve research and monitoring activities.

Students of Agronomy, Soils and Environmental Sciences (SASES) Tour North Florida Farms

submitted by Mace Bauer and Julie Driscoll

The University of Florida Agronomy and Soils Club hosted the 2008 SASES Southern Regional Conference with a tour of several north Florida farms. SASES is the student chapter for the national agronomy, crops and soils societies. About fifty students and advisors traveled from states across the country for the conference.

Conference attendees traveled to Suwannee County for farm tours organized by Mace Bauer with the UF/IFAS BMP Implementation Team. First, they went to Townsend Brothers Farm where UF/IFAS Multi-County Extension Agent Bob Hochmuth spoke about Florida vegetable production and drip irrigation and performed a fertilizer movement

demonstration. The group then went to the North Florida Research and Education Center where they learned about greenhouse vegetable production and center-pivot irrigation practices. The next stop was a visit to Black Gold Farms where Production Manager Jason Chandler spoke about potato production. The final stop was a visit to Suwannee Farms where Kenneth Hall discussed the cropping and livestock operations of the farm. Students and their faculty advisors enjoyed learning about the diverse production systems found in the area and ways which farmers are protecting the environment while providing a safe and abundant food supply.

Farmers Save Water with Improved Irrigation Systems



Over the past several months farmers in the Suwannee and Santa Fe River Basins have made water saving improvements to their irrigation systems. As part of the Suwannee River Partnership's efforts to assist farmers in using practices that help protect and save water, 65 center pivots on 30 operations covering 5,010 acres were improved. Farmers retrofitted their irrigation systems with more efficient low

pressure nozzles, which have been shown to save millions of gallons of water per irrigation system. More efficient irrigation systems also help protect water quality.

Dates to Remember

Aug. 26 Muscadine Grape Twilight Field Day
North Florida REC - Suwannee Valley, Live Oak FL. For more information call 386-362-1725.

Aug. 28 11th Annual Hay & Farm Field Day
Jacksonville FL. To register contact your local county agent in Northeast Florida or Elena Toro at 352-362-2771.

Aug. 28 NFREC Beef/Forage Field Day
North Florida Research and Education Center (NFREC) Beef Unit, Marianna, FL (one mile west of Greenwood, FL on county route 162). Registration starts at 8 a.m. CST and the program is from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. CST. Registration fee is \$10. Lunch will be provided. For further information call 850-482-9904.

Sept. 9, 16, 23, and 30 Master Wildlife Short Course
North Florida REC, Quincy FL. Management of bobwhite quail, white-tailed deer, eastern wild turkey, and native and planted wildlife foods will be discussed. Registration fees cover the cost of a textbook, handouts, and refreshments during the lectures, as well as a field trip on September 26. Contact Stan Rosenthal for more information at (850) 606-5202 or rosenthals@leoncountyfl.gov.

Oct. 8 Certified Crop Advisors
Citrus REC, Ben Hill Griffin, Jr. Citrus Hall, contact Tom Obreza, obreza@ufl.edu

Oct. 30 Santa Fe CARES Recognition Dinner
Contact Darrell Smith or Hugh Thomas (386) 362-1001

Nov. 5 Florida Ag Expo at Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, Balm, FL
Call or email Christine Cooley (813) 634-0000 #3101 ccooley@ufl.edu or go to <http://flagexpo.ifas.ufl.edu>.



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About this Newsletter

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Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Florida Department of Health
Florida Department of Community Affairs
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Geological Survey, Water Resources Division
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University's Center for Water Quality
University of Florida, Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences
Florida Rural Water Association
Suwannee River Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.
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PCS Phosphate
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The following soil and water conservation districts:
Alachua, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Santa Fe, Suwannee
The following county commissions:
Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Suwannee, Taylor, Union
The following cities and towns:
Alachua, Bell, Chiefland, Fanning Springs, High Springs, Lake City, Live Oak, Newberry, Starke, Trenton, White Springs
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