

## Farmer Spotlight: Hay Farmer Says BMPs are Easy on Water and the Wallet

MARK RANDELL, a hay farmer in Suwannee County, has found that using best management practices (BMPs) can save the environment while reducing operating expenses.

The Randell Family Hay Farm grows mostly coastal Bermuda and Bahia grass for hay production. With the help of several crop tools, purchased with cost-share funds, the farm helps protect water quality while producing healthy crops.

Randell uses a sprayer to apply nitrogen to his hay crops. From behind the tractor's steering wheel it's hard to estimate coverage. Overlap occurs, just to ensure the entire field is fertilized.

But the days of wasting fertilizer are over thanks to a GPS unit he obtained through the Suwannee River Partnership's BMPs cost share program. The technology calculates where the sprayer has been to ensure complete coverage without the overlap.

"Before, I had an overlap of 15 percent," Randell said. "That's a 15 percent loss in fertilizer."

And not only does GPS technology mean Randell saves in fertilizer costs. It means a significant reduction in nitrogen that could pollute our waterways.

Randell also has purchased a nurse tank with cost-share funds. The tank allows *continued on page 3*



*Mark Randell with his sprayer that's fitted with a GPS unit to reduce nitrogen overlap.*

## Farmers Recognized for Environmental Stewardship

TWENTY-FIVE local farmers were recognized for their efforts to protect the environment at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship (CARES) dinner on June 29.

The Florida Farm Bureau and the Suwannee River Partnership (SRP) created the CARES program to highlight efforts by farm owners to improve natural resource

management in the Suwannee and Santa Fe river basins.

CARES farmers are committed to improving the environment by implementing best management practices, which help increase irrigation efficiency and protect water quality.

"These farmers are protecting and conserving water on their farm operations,"

said SRP Coordinator Darrell Smith. "They have proven to be good stewards of the environment and we applaud their efforts."

At the event, held at the UF/IFAS Research and Education Center in Suwannee County, CARES farmers were recognized and congratulated by Florida Agriculture *continued on page 2*



*Representative Debbie Boyd welcoming the group.*

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# Nutrient Study Underway at Suwannee Farms

THE SUWANNEE River Partnership (SRP) is conducting a nutrient study on Suwannee Farms to evaluate the benefits of using organic material from its livestock operation and to determine how the farm operation may impact the environment. The study – led by the University of Florida /Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) – will evaluate the nutrients that enter and leave the farm, as well as nutrient losses to the environment.

Suwannee Farms is a diversified vegetable, row crop and cattle feeding operation in Suwannee County, situated along the Suwannee River. The farm operation consists of cattle feeding, crop production, and waste management and treatment components that are integrated to promote nutrient management efficiency, operating under a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) approved comprehensive nutrient management plan.

The project will evaluate nutrient imports to the farm, such as manure, feed and fertilizer; and nutrient exports, such as crop products that leave the farm, atmospheric loss and nutrients that might be leached into groundwater. It will also analyze soil, crops and water for nutrient concentrations.

The study will identify areas in the operation that could improve overall nutrient use and reduce losses to the environment.

“We will document the benefits of using organic nutrient sources that are recycled from the livestock operation to the crops and back to the animals as forage, thus making efficient use of the nutrients,” said Dr. George Hochmuth of UF/IFAS.

The knowledge gained from this project will be used to develop a nutrient management guide and education program for integrated nutrient management on similar diversified farm operations.

“Suwannee Farms volunteered to do the

study to take a look at the positive benefits of using recycled nutrients (compost and wastewater) from the livestock operation and to help determine if there are areas where they can improve nutrient management to reduce environmental impacts,” said SRP Coordinator Darrell Smith. “The farm owners are very interested in doing what they can to protect the environment while continuing to have a sustainable farming operation that contributes to the local economy.”

The \$50,000 project is being funded by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Suwannee River Water Management District, Suwannee Farms, GHD, the manufacturer of the anaerobic manure digester, and UF/IFAS.

The study is expected to take two years to complete.

## Farmers Recognized *continued from page 1*



*CARES farmers recognized for stewardship.*

Commissioner Charles Bronson and Pat Cockrell, of Florida Farm Bureau.

The event drew hundreds of folks, including farmers, local officials and others from both the Suwannee and Santa Fe river basins.

Following are those recognized at the CARES dinner and the counties in which their operations are located: Straughn Farms, LLC, Alachua; Ramsey Stock Farm, Alachua; Butler Farms, Alachua; Patterson Farms, Columbia; Dewy Gay Farm,



*Dairy farmers bring fresh milk, a happy cow and smiles to the event.*

Columbia; C. Bar Ranch, Columbia; Ellis Goat Farm, Gilchrist; Edwin Douglas Farm, Gilchrist; Deas Brothers Farms, Hamilton; Koon Farm, Inc., Lafayette; Witt Farm, Lafayette; Central Florida Lands & Timber, Lafayette; Southpoint Dairy, Levy; Sunset Hill Farm, Madison; Glee Heritage Acres, Madison; Kinsey Farm, Madison; S&J Farm, Madison; Diamond in the Rough Ranch, Madison; Carl Ann Corporation, Madison; Iott Hay Day Ranch, Madison;

*Cheese made in Suwannee County was served as an appetizer.*



Full Circle Dairy, Madison; Suwannee Valley Grassing, Madison; Randell Family Hay Farm, Suwannee; North Florida Research and Education Center, Suwannee; and New River Ranch, Bradford.

For more information about the CARES program, call the Suwannee River Partnership at (386) 362-1001. You may also call your county Farm Bureau office or Scot Eubanks, Florida Farm Bureau Federation, at (352) 384-2633.

# SRWMD Funding Helps Farmers Buy Tools to Protect Water Quality

THE SUWANNEE River Water Management District Governing Board voted May 13 to provide \$210,000 to the Suwannee River Partnership (SRP) to fund crop tools that will assist farmers in protecting the environment.

The program will provide 75 percent cost share to farmers for purchasing the tools, up to \$10,000 per farmer. Cost-share funds will be offered to eligible farmers in Gilchrist, Levy, Dixie, Alachua, Columbia, Union, Bradford, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee and Taylor counties.

SRP staff will select farmers based on location within spring sheds on a first-come, first-served basis.

The funds will help cover costs for technology and equipment used to implement best management practices (BMPs). BMPs help improve nutrient and irrigation management through tools, such as soil moisture probes, precision fertilizer application equipment and GPS mapping equipment.

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## Farmer Spotlight *continued from page 1*

Randell to fill, mix and load fertilizer and pesticides in the field where the application is occurring instead of at the well or fertilizer storage tank area. This reduces nitrogen and pesticide spillage in concentrated areas.

These are only a sample of the practices and tools the farm uses to protect water quality.

“It’s the thing to do,” Randell said of implementing BMPs on his farm. “It not only protects the environment, but it’s also cost effective. It saves us money to not have to apply more fertilizer than necessary.”

“This program will give farmers the tools they need to help protect our springs, rivers and ground water,” said Darrell Smith, SRP coordinator.

Smith said past experience has shown farms using a combination of these tools reduce nitrogen inputs by an average of 50 pounds per acre per year. By improving irrigation management, farmers save an average of 1.5 million gallons of water per crop season.

SRP staff will work with farmers to select crop tools that are most effective at conserving water and managing fertilizers and they will provide training to farmers as needed.

The SRP is a program made up of various partners, including public agencies, organizations and agricultural producers. It is funded by partners and other public entities, including the District.

For more information about the crop tool cost-share program, contact Darrell Smith at (386) 362-1001.

Randell and his family were among 25 farmers honored at the 10th Annual County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship (CARES) dinner on June 29. Such farmers have proven their commitment to protect water quality and increase irrigation efficiency.

The Florida Farm Bureau and the Suwannee River Partnership created the CARES program to highlight efforts by farm owners to improve natural resource management in the Suwannee and Santa Fe river basins.

## Dates to Remember

### Aug. 17 **Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance Workshop**

Jacksonville, FL. Pre-registration required. To register, call or email Erin Harlow (erine@coj.net) or Becky Davidson at (904) 387-8850. To download a registration form visit <http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu> and click on Commercial Horticulture.

### Aug. 24 **Food Safety Plan Workshop - Farm and Ranch**

Live Oak, FL. For more information, contact Lydia Von Borstel at (386) 362-1725 ext. 109 or [lvonborstel@ufl.edu](mailto:lvonborstel@ufl.edu).

### Aug. 25 **Food Safety Plan Workshop - Greenhouse**

Live Oak, FL. For more information, contact Lydia Von Borstel at (386) 362-1725 ext. 109 or [lvonborstel@ufl.edu](mailto:lvonborstel@ufl.edu).

### Aug. 26 **Alternatives to Traditional Vegetable Gardening**

Orlando, FL. For information, call the Orange County Extension Office at (407) 254-9200 or visit <http://ocextension.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### Sep. 11 **Fall Lawn Care**

Winter Garden, FL. For more information, call the Orange County Extension Office at (407) 254-9200 or visit <http://ocextension.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### Sep. 12-15 **National Goat Conference**

Tallahassee, FL. For more information, contact Angela McKenzie Jakes at (850) 875-8557 or [angela.mckenziejakes@fam.u.edu](mailto:angela.mckenziejakes@fam.u.edu)

### Sep. 16 **Landscape Design for Homeowners**

Winter Garden, FL. For more information, call the Orange County Extension Office at (407) 254-9200 or visit <http://ocextension.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### Sep. 23 **Fall Lawn Care**

Winter Garden, FL. For more information, call the Orange County Extension Office at (407) 254-9200 or visit <http://ocextension.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### Sep. 23 **Landscape Design for Homeowners**

Winter Garden, FL. For more information, call the Orange County Extension Office at (407) 254-9200 or visit <http://ocextension.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### Oct. 7 **Fall Field Day**

Quincy, FL. For more information, contact the NFREC-Quincy at (850) 875-7100

### Oct. 9 **Community Vegetable Garden - How to Start**

Orlando, FL. For more information, call the Orange County Extension Office at (407) 254-9200 or visit <http://ocextension.ifas.ufl.edu>.

### Oct. 26 **Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance Workshop**

Jacksonville, FL. Pre-registration required. To register, call or email Erin Harlow (erine@coj.net) or Becky Davidson at 904-387-8850. To download a registration form visit <http://duval.ifas.ufl.edu> and click on Commercial Horticulture.



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## About this Newsletter

For more information, please contact:  
Carolyn S. Saft  
UF/IFAS Extension Suwannee County  
at (386) 362-2771 or [csaft318@ufl.edu](mailto:csaft318@ufl.edu)  
or visit our Web site:  
[www.suwannee.org](http://www.suwannee.org)

You may also contact Darrell Smith,  
Hugh Thomas or Joel Love at  
(386) 362-0431

*Editor*  
Carolyn S. Saft

*Graphic Designer*  
Raghu Consbruck  
UF/IFAS Information and  
Communication Services



## Suwannee River Partnership Members

- Suwannee River Water Management District (Chair)
- 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 of Food and Agricultural Sciences
- Florida Rural Water Association
- Suwannee River Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.
- Pilgrim's Pride
- Southeast Milk, Inc.
- Biofilter Systems, LLC
- Florida Farm Bureau Federation
- Florida Cattlemen's Association
- Florida Forestry Association
- Florida Fertilizer and Agrichemical Association
- Florida Poultry Federation, Inc.
- Florida Onsite Wastewater Association
- Anderson Columbia Co., Inc.
- Cedar Key Aquaculture Association
- Nestlé Waters of North America
- PCS Phosphate
- Coca-Cola Dannon
- 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
- Adopt-A-River
- Santa Fe Springs Working Group
- Suwannee American Cement, LLC