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Partnership NEWS

Vol. 5 No. 2 Spring 2009

Partnership Informs Springs Working Group about Agriculture BMPs



THE SUWANNEE RIVER Partnership was asked to present a program about what agriculture is doing to protect the springs and groundwater in the Fanning/Manatee Springs watershed during the quarterly Fanning/Manatee Springs Working Group Meeting held on February 12th at Fanning Springs City Hall. Hugh Thomas, with the Partnership, presented an overview of the BMP programs and the number of participating farms and acreage in the basin. He was joined by Tom Harper of Harper Farms and Ron St. John of Alliance Dairies. Tom Harper discussed his Registered Red Angus Cow/Calf operation and how BMPs enable him to grow forage for his beef cows more efficiently with less fertilizer and water. Ron St. John presented a PowerPoint presentation contrasting the

operation of two of his dairies; one a full confinement operation and the other a rotational grazing dairy. He spoke about the strategies used in managing animal wastes, and management and economic differences between the operations.

On Friday, February 13th Partnership staff met with 22 of the working group members in Trenton to start an all day field trip to four farms. The group's first stop was the Tommy Jones Top Quality Hay Farm. Here Tommy and Mace Bauer (IFAS BMP Implementation Team) discussed how utilizing GPS/Light Bar technology and boom applicators saves fertilizer, chemicals, diesel, and labor while providing for a better hay crop and protecting groundwater that eventually supplies the area springs. Next the group visited a farm leased

by Kelly Philman where he is currently growing rye grass to be harvested for a local dairy. Kelly and Mace spoke about utilizing soil moisture monitoring equipment to schedule irrigation events and tissue testing to determine fertilizer applications.

After lunch the group visited Alliance Dairy located between Trenton and Chiefland to see how a total confinement dairy is operated, and how the animal wastes are being composted to produce a fertilizer and soil amendment ready for the wholesale and retail market. Lastly, Ron St. John led the group to another of his dairies, South Point in Levy County, where cows are rotationally grazed in a different pasture following each milking cycle.

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Farmer's Spotlight: Progressive Farms

OVER THE PAST three years twenty-two farms in the Suwannee basin have collectively been called "The Progressive Farms," and for good reason. These farms have been leaders in the agricultural community by demonstrating the latest in technologies and conservation practices that protect ground water quality and maximize water-use efficiency.

In February, these farmers gathered to discuss what they have learned in the process of working with the Suwannee

River Partnership. The farmers shared their experiences working with new BMP tools like sap nutrient meters, soil moisture sensors, fertilizer application equipment, and GPS systems. Users explained how these tools helped to make their operation more manageable, efficient, and profitable. Terry Folsom of Folsom and Prine Farms located in Lafayette County said, "soil moisture graphs are very helpful in determining timely irrigation applications."

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About this Newsletter

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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
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Local Farmers Get Schooled on Crop Management

MADISON, FL, February 11, 2009 — Dozens of local farmers and agriculture industry professionals learned about new innovations in crop management at a recent crop management school hosted by the Suwannee River Partnership.

The event was held at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Extension office in Madison. Those who attended were offered continuing education credits. Lunch was prepared by Dan Buchanan and Madison County Farm Bureau.

Staff from the Suwannee River Water Management District kicked off the school with a presentation covering a range of



Area farmers learn about the newest innovations and techniques in crop management while attending the Crop Management School hosted by the Suwannee River Partnership.



Monitoring the GPS system during field demonstrations.



Field demonstrations of BMP practices at the Madison County Crop Management School.

water issues including water-use permitting, water-use monitoring, minimum flows and levels, and total maximum daily loads.

Presentations by Jefferson County farmer Kirk Brock and University of Florida professor David Wright emphasized the benefits of using conservation tillage systems.

Tim Kelly, owner of Southeastern Agri-Labs, provided an overview of his enterprise and its goal of educating farmers to be site-specific when fertilizing. Jarrod Harris, with Ag Technologies, followed with a presentation introducing the most modern equipment being used to make farming more efficient.

The one-day course concluded with

a presentation on pesticide-fertilizer irrigation record keeping, with an emphasis on the importance of maintaining continuous and accurate records.

Many participants also attended a field demonstration at DeWayne Leslie's farm where they were able to see the equipment they had just learned about in operation.

The Suwannee River Partnership is a group of 63 local, state, and federal agencies, and other participating members dedicated to improving water quality, saving water, and strengthening agriculture in North Florida.

For more information about the Suwannee River Partnership, visit www.suwannee.org.

PARTNERSHIP INFORMS SPRINGS GROUP continued from page 1

Animal waste handling practices at each of the dairies were discussed and compared as well as challenges to each operation.

Members of the springs working group indicated that the field trip was very educational and that they were generally not aware that agriculture was doing so much to protect the natural resources within the springsheds. The Partnership would like to thank each of these farmers for allowing us to go on their farms and for their participation in the discussions.

FARMER'S SPOTLIGHT: PROGRESSIVE FARMS continued from page 1

Folsom and Prine are well known for their fresh, high-quality market produce and use of BMPs in an environmentally sustainable manner. The tools used by Folsom and Pine are welcomed by the growers and in some cases growers consider them indispensable. Multi-county extension agent Bob Hochmuth asked Gilchrist county farmer Kelly Philman, "If you could keep only one tool, which one would it be?" Mr. Philman said, "All of them" emphasizing how each tool, whether it be irrigation or nutrient related, is vital to successful farming now and in the future.

There was also discussion on how

important it is to educate the public about what these farms are doing to maintain or improve the natural resources that we share. On many occasions, these farmers have invited the public and environmental interest groups to their farms to demonstrate the efforts being made by the agricultural community. A continuing goal of the SRP is to increase public awareness of the issues, and encourage participation in working to find solutions.

— Andy Schrader and Mace Bauer, UF/IFAS BMP Implementation Team

Florida Friendly Landscaping

HOMEOWNERS ARE learning ways to conserve and to fertilize properly by attending Florida Friendly Landscaping workshops. The Suwannee River Partnership in its effort to expand to a watershed-wide approach is supporting the training of Master Gardener volunteers to help get the sound landscaping practices out to the general public.

Master Gardener volunteers in Alachua, Baker, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy, Suwannee, and Taylor counties are helping spread the nine principles for Florida Friendly Landscaping. The programs include micro-irrigation set up, composting, installing rain-barrels, pest control, lawn maintenance, and proper plant selection for site conditions (right plant, right place).

The nine principles of Florida-friendly landscaping are:

- 1. Right plant, right place.** Plants selected to suit a specific site will require minimal amounts of water, fertilizers, and pesticides.
- 2. Water efficiently.** Irrigate only when your lawn needs water. Efficient watering is the key to a healthy Florida yard and conservation of limited resources.
- 3. Fertilize appropriately.** Less is often best. Overuse of fertilizers can be hazardous to your yard and the environment.
- 4. Mulch.** Maintaining a 3-inch layer of mulch will help retain soil moisture, prevent erosion, and suppress weeds.
- 5. Attract wildlife.** Plants in your yard that provide food, water, and shelter will attract Florida's diverse wildlife.
- 6. Manage yard pests responsibly.** Unwise use of pesticides can harm people, pets, beneficial organisms, and the environment.
- 7. Recycle.** Grass clippings and leaves provide nutrients to the soil and reduce waste disposal when reused on the landscape.
- 8. Reduce stormwater runoff.** Water running off your landscape can carry pollutants such as soil, debris, fertilizer, gasoline and pesticides that can adversely impact water quality. Reduction of this runoff will help prevent nonpoint-source pollution.
- 9. Protect the waterfront.** Waterfront property, whether on a river, stream, pond, bay, or beach, is very fragile and should be carefully protected to maintain freshwater and marine ecosystems.

Look for programs at your local libraries, Extension offices, and even some local dining spots to learn more about environmentally aesthetic landscaping and gardening. For more information on Florida-friendly yards, visit www.FloridaYards.org or call your local UF IFAS Extension office for more details.



Master Gardener volunteers are trained to help educate the public about Florida-friendly landscaping.

Dates to Remember

Apr. 14-16 Restoration Planning and Techniques for Forested Lands
Bristol, FL. For more information visit nata.snre.ufl.edu

Apr. 15 Forest Stewardship Silvopasture Tour
George C. Owens Farm, 9:00-3:00pm. George Owens' farm is one of the most renowned silvopasture operations in the Southeastern U.S. This program is free but preregistration is required. Call the UF/IFAS Washington County Extension Office at (850) 638-6180 to register. Please register by April 10. For more information: www.sfrc.ufl.edu/Extension/florida_forestry_information/events_calendar/

Apr. 16 BMP Certification Training - Spanish Class
BMP Certification Training. Class in Spanish. Cost: \$25.00/person. Lee County Extension Office, 3406 Palm Beach Blvd., Fort Myers, FL, for more information, call (239) 533-7504.

Apr. 20- May 1 58th Annual Beef Cattle Short Course
UF/IFAS Department of Animal Sciences, UF Hilton Conference Center

Apr. 30 Best Management Practices Certification
8:00am - 3:15pm. Offered in English and Spanish. \$10 per person, non-refundable registration fee. Deadline to register is April 24, 2009. CEU's available in: CORE, Ornamental & Turf, Private Applicator Agricultural, Commercial Lawn & Ornamental, Limited Lawn & Ornamental, Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance. Call (407) 254-9200 or visit landscape.ifas.ufl.edu, Orange County Extension, 6021 S. Conway Rd, Orlando, FL 32812

May 5 Peach Field Day
Citra, FL. For more information contact Jeff Williamson at (352) 392-1928 ext. 303 or email jgrw@ufl.edu

May 14 Fruit & Nut Twilight Field Day
North Florida REC - Suwannee Valley, Live Oak, FL. For more information, contact Karen Hancock at (386) 362-1725 ext. 101 or email khancock@ufl.edu

Jun. 7-9 Florida State Horticultural Society Meeting
Jacksonville, FL. For more information, contact Mary Lamberts at (305) 248-3311 ext. 234 or email lamberts@ufl.edu

Jun. 16 Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance Workshop
9:00am - 3:30pm, 6-hour required class to sit for the LCLM exam, \$50.00 for full-day, includes 2 text books, lunch, and notebook OR \$25.00 for half-day (recertification), includes lunch. Pre-registration required, Clay County Extension Office; 2463 SR 16 West, Green Cove Springs, FL 32043, call Michelle at (904) 269-6355 or (904) 284-6355

Jul. 10-11 Tractor Short Course
NFREC Quincy, FL. For more information call (850) 875-7100.

Jul. 13-16 American Society for Placticulture Meeting
Penn State University.

Jul. 29-31 Farm to Fuel Summit
Rosen Shingle Creek, Orlando FL. For more information visit www.floridafarmtofuel.com/summit_2009.htm

Aug. 1-2 Florida Small Farms and Alternative Enterprises Conference
Osceola Heritage Park, Kissimmee FL. For general conference information contact Mandy Stage at (352) 392-5930 or email mstage@ufl.edu. For additional educational program content information, contact Danielle Treadwell at (352) 392-1925 or email ddtreadwell@ufl.edu.