

## Farmer Spotlight: Brock Family Farm



*Kirk Brock, left, shows Mace Bauer how his crops benefit from conservation farming practices.*

THE BROCK Family Farm is a leader in conservation farming in the Suwannee Basin. Located in Monticello, the Brocks, Kirk and his father Gene, farm about 1,000 acres of rolling hills in Jefferson County. In addition to being progressive in their adoption of best management practices and conservation tillage, Kirk takes every opportunity to teach other

farmers how these practices work on his farm. In 2008, Kirk gave a presentation to nearly 60 farmers at the Suwannee River Partnership's Crop Management School held in Madison. He also presented his experiences to a large audience at the Corn and Peanut Growers Twilight Tour held at the North Florida REC in Live Oak. Many of the guests at these events said that Kirk's

**"I feel like farmers should be involved with each other and communicate with one another about what's working and problems that they may have."**

— Kirk Brock of Brock Family Farm

presentation was the highlight, and they were eager to go back to their farms to explore ways to improve their practices.

The Brocks' style of farming is adapted from years of experience, with Gene farming this land for six decades. And the land is challenging—sandy topsoil, low natural fertility, and steep slopes. To improve their soils, they have adopted no-till practices, in conjunction with a high-biomass rye cover crop. The rye cover crop traps nutrients left behind from the previous cash crop; this reduces any opportunity for nutrient losses off the field. In the spring, Kirk uses a homemade cover crop roller, which lays the rye flat in the field, before no-tilling seed into the soil.

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## The Suwannee River Partnership Receives Grant Funding

TWO GRANT proposals submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) earlier this year, will receive funding. The Partnership submitted proposals through the USDA Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), and the Agriculture Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) programs to provide funds to help farmers continue to improve irrigation systems and irrigation water management.

The Partnership will receive \$75,000 as part of the State of Florida NRCS, CIG allocation. The proposal will help develop and demonstrate an "Advanced

Irrigation Scheduling" package for farmers to use. The irrigation scheduling package recommendations will include tools such as easy-to-use guidelines and electronic equipment to help farmers maximize their irrigation system efficiency. This would save water and assist farmers in saving on irrigation costs. Better irrigation scheduling could also help reduce the loss of fertilizers that affect water quality.

The AWEP grant will provide \$750,000 over a two-year period to farmers to upgrade older irrigation system power units and pumps. These upgrades will *continued on page 2*

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## Best Management Practices Miniature Farm Model a Big Hit!

THE SUWANNEE River Partnership staff and local extension agents use a three-dimensional farm model to demonstrate best management practices (BMPs). The miniature model farm, which attracts youth and adults at fairs, festivals, field days, and schools, was on display at the Sunbelt Expo. Since travel logistics don't always allow people to view BMPs on a real farm, we bring the model farm to the people.

The farm is set up in three sections to depict a dairy farm, a poultry farm and a row crop farm. Some of the BMPs highlighted for dairy farms are:

- install lined or concrete waste lagoons
- maintain a 12" free-board margin in lagoon
- put up fences along streams to keep livestock out of water
- establish buffers like berms or plant vegetation to capture any nutrient or pesticide runoff
- collect manure samples regularly and analyze them for nutrient content
- use test results and realistic yields to determine application rates and timing
- retrofit center-pivot irrigation systems with drop down nozzles
- calibrate the irrigation system

A few of the poultry BMPs include:

- place chicken litter on concrete pads or clay to prevent leaching of nutrients
- store chicken litter and waste under roofs or plastic covers
- locate stockpile facility away from water sources and adjacent properties
- follow composting guidelines – maintain temperature, moisture and rotation

- add gutters to poultry barns to keep roof water away from the animal lot – this may prevent water from flowing over the lot
- collect litter samples regularly and have them analyzed for nutrient content
- use test results and realistic yields to determine application rates and timing

Some of the row crop BMPs shown on the farm model include:

- soil testing on annual or semi-annual basis to determine nutrients in the soil
- use of global positioning satellite (GPS) devices on tractors for uniform application of fertilizers and pesticides
- use of cover crops, planting of barrier plants to attract beneficial insects which prey on damaging insects
- use of wildflowers help bring in pollinators

Additional BMPs include the use of soil moisture probe sensors and data collection units to determine irrigation needs of crops, use of plastic mulch and drip irrigation, sap testing of plant tissue for nutrient diagnostics and determination of fertilizer needs.

The miniature farm was created by Suwannee County Master Gardener volunteers and the Horticulture Agent. The model is available for any organization that wants to educate others about sustainable agriculture. Please call the Suwannee County Extension office at (386) 362-2771 or contact Carolyn Saft at [csaft318@ufl.edu](mailto:csaft318@ufl.edu) for more information.



*Children and adults view BMPs on a miniature model farm.*

### SRP GRANT FUNDING

*continued from page 1*

allow farmers to save water and fuel while reducing air emissions. The funds will be administered similarly to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding through NRCS in the Suwannee and Santa Fe Basins. The Partnership is working with NRCS to develop eligible practices and ranking criteria for the grant program.

These grant initiatives will build on successful Partnership programs. The Partnership has worked with crop farmers to improve irrigation system efficiency over the last five years by upgrading their irrigation system nozzle packages. Also, close to 75% of crop farmers in the basin have agreed to implement the State of Florida Vegetable and Agronomic Crops Best Management Practices Guide, which helps protect and save water.

**The AWEPP grant will provide \$750,000 over a two-year period to farmers to upgrade older irrigation system power units and pumps.**

## FARMER SPOTLIGHT *continued from page 1*

The cover crop serves many other purposes including preventing runoff of rainfall. Water that is absorbed into the soil is available to recharge the soil profile for the next crop. This prevents water runoff which could take sediments and fertilizers with it. The rye cover also reduces evaporation of water from the soil surface and keeps the ground cooler, putting less stress on the crops. Additionally, as the rye decomposes, the nutrients which were trapped are released to the next crop; this cycling of nutrients prevents their loss from the fields. The residue on the soil surface also creates an environment where beneficial insects thrive, and has reduced the need for chemical use to control undesirable insects.

The Brock Family Farm is a leader in Conservation Farming and BMPs and is an asset to other farmers who want to learn to be better managers. Kirk summarized



*Kirk Brock examines the growth and root system of a rye cover crop.*

his feeling when he said, “I love farming,” and “I feel like farmers should be involved with each other and communicate with one another about what’s working and problems that they may have.”

— Mace Bauer, UF/IFAS BMP Implementation Team

## FFA Youth Compete in State Contest on Environmental Issues

FLORIDA FFA is pleased to announce the results of the 2009-2010 State Environmental Science Career Development Event (CDE) recently held in Live Oak at the IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center. Ten (10) teams from throughout Florida gathered to compete for the state championship. The purpose of the Environmental Science CDE is to stimulate student interest and learning activities related to environmental science and natural resources education. This event is made possible by a strong partnership between the Florida FFA Association and the University of Florida IFAS Extension, Suwannee River Partnership and the Suwannee Soil and Water Conservation District. Florida FFA is very appreciative of the support of our event coordinator, Carolyn Saft.

### High School Teams

1. 2784 Orlando Colonial
2. 2777 Okeechobee Brahman
3. 2735 New Smyrna Beach
4. 2602 Pine Ridge
5. 2566 Deltona
6. 2537 Deland
7. 2459 Mulberry
8. 2357 Seminole Vo-Ed
9. 2342 Sarasota Riverview
10. 1736 Braden River



## Dates to Remember

- Jan. 22-23 AGRItunity**  
Sumter, FL. For more information visit <http://sumter.ifas.ufl.edu/agritunity/index.htm>
- Feb. 3 Crop Management School “Focus on Conservation Farming”**  
Suwannee County Extension, Live Oak, FL 8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Contact Pam Burke at [peburke@ufl.edu](mailto:peburke@ufl.edu) or (386) 362-2771
- Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26 Annie’s Project: Management Education for Today’s Farm Women**
- Mar. 5, 12** Suwannee County Extension, Live Oak, FL. For more information contact Mary Sowerby at (386) 362-2771.
- Feb. 25-27 SAF 26th Annual Pest and Production Management Conference**  
Hyatt Regency Orlando Airport, Orlando. Contact P. Fisher at [pfisher@ufl.edu](mailto:pfisher@ufl.edu)
- Mar. 17-18 Starting a Successful Hydroponic & 19 Business**  
North Florida REC - Suwannee Valley, Live Oak, FL. Cost of registration is: Classroom and Greenhouse Sessions (Mar 17 & 18) \$295 per person; Optional Growers Tour (Mar 19) \$50 per person. Space is limited to a maximum of 40 persons; seats will only be held upon receipt of registration and payment. For more information contact Karen Hancock at (386) 362-1725 ext 101, email [khancock@ufl.edu](mailto:khancock@ufl.edu) or Wanda Laughlin at (386) 362-1725 ext 104, email [solus@ufl.edu](mailto:solus@ufl.edu).
- Mar. 19-20 Starting a Successful Hydroponic Business**  
North Florida REC - Suwannee Valley, Live Oak, FL. Cost of registration is: Optional Growers Tour (Mar 19) \$50 per person, Classroom and Greenhouse Sessions (Mar 19 & 20) \$295 per person; per person. Space is limited to a maximum of 40 persons; seats will only be held upon receipt of registration and payment. For more information contact Karen Hancock at (386) 362-1725 ext 101, email [khancock@ufl.edu](mailto:khancock@ufl.edu) or Wanda Laughlin at (386) 362-1725 ext 104, email [solus@ufl.edu](mailto:solus@ufl.edu).



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## 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
- Sunbelt Milk Producers
- 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