

UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County



Providing Solutions

2023 Year in Review

Greetings from the UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County Extension Director

Wow! 2023 flew by fast. We have been in our new facility for about two years and our face-to-face programming is back to normal. This year our Extension faculty and staff team has had some outstanding accomplishments and impacts. Our six Extension agents continue to help citizens of Alachua County better their lives through agriculture, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H youth development programs and activities. In 2023 alone, over 1 million educational contacts were made, 350 educational programs were given, and over 13,000 citizens attended Extension programs and activities. I invite you to come see us in Newberry and visit our website for upcoming events: sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/alachua

Dr. Cindy Sanders

UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County
Director/Livestock Agent

Family & Consumer Sciences



Financial Series Helps Family Cut Monthly Grocery Bill in Half!

One of the individuals participating in the financial series signed up for the class because he lost his job, which placed a hardship on his family. He found a new job after three months of being without work; however, during that three-month period, he accumulated a high amount of debt. His pastor told him about and provided him with information on a four-week financial class taught by an Alachua County Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) agent. The course focused on spending plans, credit score and management, three keys to saving, and budgeting and grocery shopping. During the class, the individual set goals, prepared his family's budget and monthly spending plan, and checked his credit score. He also met with the FCS agent one-on-one to develop a plan to reduce his overspending on his family's monthly grocery bill. By sticking to his monthly budget and paying off items with the highest interest first, he was able to pay off his debt in six months. He said, "I can now save for an emergency or rainy day thanks to the information I learned in the financial series. I am grateful my pastor shared the class information with me and both he and the Alachua County FCS agent provided me such useful financial information that helped me and my family make smarter along with healthier decisions."



Environmental Horticulture

The Follow the Water (FTW) program measured the connectedness to water (CTW) of participants using the Concise Connectedness to Water instrument developed by Warner and Diaz (2020). Their 2020 statewide data indicated 3,596 homeowners had an average sense of connection to water of 0.5 (scale of -2 to 2). The closer an individual's score is to 2, the more connected they feel to water and the more likely they are to practice conservation. The 2022 FTW participants had a mean pre CTW of 1.47 (N=11) and a post mean CTW of 1.79 (N=13). This indicates that the attendees were already more connected to water before they participated in the program than most Floridians, likely because they are Master Gardener Volunteers. A one-year follow-up survey was performed with previous participants to determine if and how their connectedness to water had changed over time. The survey indicated participants are maintaining a strong connection to water even after time passes. The program provides approximately 32 hours of water resource education, amounting to a \$1,600 value (32 hours X \$50 industry cost of instruction) per person.

4-H Youth Development

Alachua County 4-H Legacy Endowment

In 2023, thanks to the generous support of many donors, the Alachua County 4-H Legacy Endowment was formed. From this fund, two scholarships that support youth participating in district, state, and national events as first-time attendees will be awarded in honor of the legacies of the late Bill Brown and Bobby Damron.

William Lloyd "Bill" Brown Jr. was a teacher, mentor, and respected leader within the community. Within his role with UF/IFAS Extension, Bill was an avid supporter of the UF/IFAS Extension Florida 4-H Youth Development Program. He was instrumental in starting the Alachua County Youth Fair and Livestock Show and was the driving force behind it while he was the Extension director. Over forty years later, his impact is still seen through both the Alachua County Youth Fair and Livestock Show and our whole 4-H program.

A native of Gainesville, Florida, Dr. Bobby Leon Damron grew up participating in 4-H poultry projects and competing as a member of the state's 4-H Poultry Judging team. He was a member of the Alachua County Youth Fair and Livestock Board. He also judged youth poultry shows and helped with the state 4-H and FFA Poultry Judging Contests well into his retirement.

We are grateful for the support of their families and local community members who allowed this endowment fund to be possible so that young people can benefit from these 4-H opportunities forever.

Commercial Horticulture

Demo of Controlled Release Fertilizer as a Potential BMP on Suwannee Valley Watermelon Farms

Best management practices (BMPs) provide benefits to producers and the environment. Many producers have reduced costs and increased yields using proven BMPs. UF/IFAS Extension agents solicited and received funding support of \$100,000 for a new 1-year pilot demonstration project. This project was implemented in 2023 to demonstrate how to improve nitrogen use efficiency through controlled release fertilizer (CRF) technology and the 4 R's (right source, right rate, right time, and right place) on seven watermelon farms in the Suwannee Valley. Extension faculty and support staff visited the project farms weekly and collected leaf tissue samples for petiole-sap testing and whole leaf tissue analysis. In addition, soil moisture sensor (SMS) data were assessed, and ongoing guidance was provided to the cooperating farmers. Yield data were collected from each project farm so comparisons could be made between the farmer's conventional fertilizer program and the CRF program.

After participating in this project, farmers agreed that the CRF can deliver comparable total yields when employed as a BMP compared to conventional fertilizer programs. One of the most important gains in knowledge noted on 100% of the participating farms was the importance of managing the drip irrigation system regardless of whether the farmer was using conventional or CRF programs.

Continuing education units (CEUs) have been offered (2016–2022). Education units are necessary for pesticide license renewal resulting in a total economic change of \$1,346,700.



Ag & Community Development

The UF/IFAS Extension director continues to market agriculture not only in Alachua County, but across the state. By serving on city, county, and state committees, the county Extension director (CED) has developed key relationships with community partners. As a member of the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners Rural Concerns Committee since 2004, the CED assists the committee with addressing rural concerns for Alachua County. One success that this Board appointed committee has supported for the past two years is the Alachua County Small Producers Grant. This grant is funded by the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners (BoCC), with about \$100,000 going to support farmers in Alachua County. This program has also developed a marketing opportunity for the Extension Ag Entrepreneur Program to educate those grant recipients in the future. In addition, the director serves on the Newberry F-300 AgriFoodTech Park stakeholder working group. Members included the city of Newberry, UF/IFAS, Agriculture Intelligence, Inc., MNT Technologies, a former UF Innovate administrator, a former state representative, the landowner of the future AgriFoodTech Park site, GBM, and Axcel Innovation. This project will be adjacent to the UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County office and will afford UF/IFAS Extension another partnership with local agribusinesses and producers.

Ag & Natural Resources

Toxic Weed Diagnosis for Local Sheep Producer

The UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County agricultural agent was called to a producer's pasture after 30 goats died suddenly. The producer had another estimated 30 head of sheep that needed to graze in the same pasture where the goats died. However, the producer was afraid to release the sheep in this pasture because he suspected the presence of a toxic weed. The Extension agent walked the pasture and identified a fence line on which the toxic vine Japanese honeysuckle was growing. This plant has been known to cause mortality in grazing animals. The vine was fruiting and displayed clear signs of grazing. Rather than finding more land to lease, the producer was able to inexpensively exclude the animals from that part of the fence so they could graze. Each sheep is valued at about \$100. Therefore, the Extension agent was able to save the producer around \$3,000 because the remaining 30 sheep survived. No further livestock deaths were reported by the producer.

2023 Statistics

Workload Indicators for 2023 *(Based on six faculty UF/IFAS Extension agents)*

248 volunteers donated **20,196** hours of service back to the community equating to **\$642,232** in value
350 UF/IFAS Extension programs were offered in 2023
13,137 citizens participated in group learning events

Total Educational Contacts	Educational Materials Prepared	Field and Office Visits	Participants at Group Learning Events	Telephone and Email	Number of Extension Programs	Social Media and Website
1 million	315	3,076	13,137	7,517	350	2 million

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