UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County New Building

On November 30, 2021, the official ribbon cutting ceremony was held for the new UF/IFAS Extension office and auditorium. This new building has been a long time coming, several fairgrounds’ committees, and much planning over the past several years. This new building is used to house six Extension faculty, three county staff, and one program assistant. In addition to faculty and staff, there is approximately 90 4-H and 120 Master Gardener volunteers. Pre COVID-19, over 350 educational programs were offered, with approximately 25,000 citizens attending.

The teaching kitchen in the auditorium is used for cooking and nutrition classes, 4-H classes, demonstrations, and other programs. The auditorium allows ample seating for more than 300 citizens to attend Extension programs, in addition to Master Gardener, 4-H, and Youth Fair trainings and private functions and events. Several programs have more than 100 people registered, so this large space provides an opportunity to educate more citizens interested in a variety of Extension programs. Furthermore, the auditorium can be divided into three meeting rooms to accommodate different programs simultaneously. We thank the City of Newberry for contributing $1 million and the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Sciences for contributing $400,000 to partner with Alachua County on this transformational project.

Dr. Cindy Sanders
UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County
Director/Livestock Agent
Preserving Garden Food Saved Family Money

Preserving produce from their family garden made a big difference in one local family’s health. After having COVID, Mary had issues with high blood pressure that she could not control. She called the FCS Extension agent for information about the DASH diet and about the canning and freezing series of webinars that was being offered. Mary attended all four Food Preservation webinars that were conducted. She started preserving all her family’s food because she could control the sodium in the food. The agent provided her with EDIS publications on food preservation, one on one training, along with the So Easy to Preserve book from National Center for Home Food Preservation. After six months of eating food Mary had frozen and canned, she began to see a difference in her blood pressure. After her recent visit to the doctor, he informed Mary if her blood pressure stayed at the level, he was going to take her off her blood pressure medication. Mary was so excited and thanked the agent for helping her. She said, “not only can I control the sodium that goes into the food I am preparing the food is fresher and taste better than what I purchase at the store.”

Calculating Fertilizer Application Amounts, based off of Soil Analysis, Reduces Nutrient Application Excess and Production Input Costs for Livestock Producers

There are around 71,273 acres of pastureland in Alachua County, Florida according to the USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Survey (2017). In order to ensure adequate forage potential, landowners and land managers will apply fertilizer to their pastures each year. Many of these livestock producers will apply fertilizer amounts that have “worked well in the past” or that were recommended to them by fertilizer sales representatives. Unfortunately, under these circumstances, fertilizer application amounts can be inflated. Excess nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) can have deleterious effects on Florida’s water systems. Alachua County contains two water management districts, the St. Johns River and the Suwanee River Management Districts. The Environmental Protection Agency’s water quality standards regulations aim to lower the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus into various water systems.

An Alachua County bahiagrass pasture manager was planning on applying 300 lbs/acre of a 20-10-10 dry bulk fertilizer to a 150 acre field. This rate was based on recommendations the grower received from industry consultants and neighbors. However, after a field consultation and soil samples were taken by the Alachua County Extension Agent, it was decided that this rate would result in excess amounts of P and K. The fertilizer mix was adjusted to meet recommendations provided by UF/IFAS Extension. Instead of applying 20-10-10 bulk fertilizer at 300 lbs/acre the producer applied 20-0-5 at 300 lbs/acre. The total amount of fertilizer was reduced by 6,750 lbs (4,500 lbs P and 2,250 lbs K) over a 150 acre field and resulted in a net savings of $2,250 dollars for the producer.
A group of regional and county Extension Agents in the Suwannee Valley Region has joined efforts to better serve Florida’s watermelon industry. Together, we offer an array of services including weekly production updates and sap testing during the season, on-farm research, fertilizer injection testing, and pest and disease monitoring. To educate others about Florida’s watermelon production, the group published a watermelon Field Guide sponsored by the Florida Watermelon Association in the Spring of 2021. This publication consists of 135 pages of pictures taken by Extension Agents accompanied by descriptions of all the aspects of watermelon production. The field guide has been very well received by producers and allied industry and more than 450 copies have been sold in less than a year after publication. In the end-of-the-season survey, producers rated their satisfaction with the guide as 8.8 out of 10. During the recent Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute, the publication was offered as an incentive for new members of the Florida Watermelon Association. The Association indicated that the field guides were a tremendous success with their members and that they were able to sign up 8 new grower members the day of the event. The Association has reached out to the agents to purchase more field guides and we have completed our second reprint for 200 additional copies. The success here is not the number of guides sold, but the numerous testimonials from the clientele who have enjoyed this educational publication and recognized the efforts and extension services provided by this group.

The field guide authors include Tatiana Sanchez, Bob Hochmuth, Tyler Pittman, Mark Warren, Sylvia Willis, Luke Harlow, Jay Cappasso, Danielle Sprague and Dan Fenneman. Along with other agents in the region, this group offers a comprehensive extension service in 10 watermelon producing counties.

The 2021 UF/IFAS Extension Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Alachua County plant sale was held at the Alachua County Camp Cuscawilla, due to the fact our new facilities was not completed in Newberry. The Master Gardeners once again succeed even with the change in location and facilities. The Master Gardeners propagated over 3,000 plants and sold approximately 4,500 plants on May 15, 2021. The plant sale generated over $28,000. These funds are used for educational programs throughout the year. Some of the Master Gardener projects include school gardens, community gardens, educational programs, field days, teaching gardens at the UF/IFAS Extension office and Florida Friendly Landscaping programs. The Master Gardeners in Alachua County are comprised of about 130 volunteers that volunteered approximately 8,000 hours back to our community in 2021.

At the start of the 2021-2022 4-H year, UF/IFAS Extension Florida 4-H Youth Development Program Alachua County had officially returned to in-person programming along with the rest of Florida 4-H. With a new 4-H Extension Agent and state events that had been virtual for over a year, this was the perfect time to re-invigorate the program by providing senior 4-H’ers the opportunity to get involved at one of the highest levels in 4-H: State Executive Board. The 4-H Agent created a list of 4-H seniors in Alachua County who had demonstrated some level of leadership or citizenship spark and then reached out to each of these 4-H’ers personally to tell them about Executive Board and how to apply. After conversations with 17 4-H seniors, Alachua County now has 11 members on State Executive Board, which is more than double any other county’s representation. All eight of the Executive Board committees have representation from Alachua County 4-H’ers. Two of these members also ran for and were elected to State Officer roles, which is the maximum number that a county can have on the officer team. This is important because it highlights the importance of the way 4-H and Extension communicates its programs and opportunities, and this increased level of participation should encourage more youth from multiple clubs to be involved in the future. Ultimately, their involvement will contribute to their life skill development—the ultimate goal of the 4-H program.
2021 Statistics

Workload Indicators for 2021 (Based on 6 Faculty UF/IFAS Extension Agents and 1 4-H Program Coordinator)

• 210 Volunteers donated 10,075 hours of service back to the community equating to $235,050 in value
• UF/IFAS Extension Agents in Alachua County reached over 1 million citizens where research based information was shared
• 374 UF/IFAS Extension programs were offered in 2021
• 15,000 citizens participated in group learning events

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<th>Total Educational Contacts</th>
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<th>Field &amp; Office Consultations</th>
<th>Participants at group learning events</th>
<th>Telephone &amp; email</th>
<th>Number of Extension Programs offered</th>
<th>Website hits</th>
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Due to COVID-19 all programs were held on a virtual platform and our office was closed to the public during this time. Therefore, program numbers decreased however, participants actually increased. Our agents conducted virtual classes where participants attending were from all over the United States and other countries.

UF/IFAS Extension Alachua County Agents

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