

AG COMMUNICATOR

Official Newsletter of the Agriculture Institute of Florida

Second Quarter, 2008

'AG-Vocate' Spokesperson Nominees Sought

The Agriculture Institute of Florida is accepting nominees for its second annual "AG-Vocate" honor.

The honor recognizes an individual who effectively communicates with opinion leaders and the general public, thereby increasing recognition of, and appreciation for, the important contributions agriculture makes to Florida's economy and environment.

Candidates must have an affiliation with Florida's agricultural industry as a farmer, producer, grower or an affiliated allied industry. All candidates must reside in Florida and represent a Florida-based industry and interests.

Submissions for the honor should include specific details and any supporting materials as to why this candidate is worthy of the honor. Deadline to enter is Aug. 15.

For more information, contact Scott Wallin at 1-800-516-4443 or visit www.aiflorida.org



AIF Media Awareness Campaign Marches On

The Ag Institute of Florida continues to work closely with Orlando-based Consensus Communications on its awareness campaign that is funded by many industry-related associations and businesses.

The issues affecting agriculture present opportunities for AIF to elevate its presence as an opinion leader within the industry and the media. They offer AIF the opportunity



An employee at Dairy Production Systems in north Florida works to get the cows ready for a milking shift. DPS is the focus of a media relations pitch by AIF and Consensus Communications. Read the DPS news release on Page 3.

to demonstrate how its members are effectively dealing with issues.

AIF has sent position papers and news releases to the media statewide on issues including:

- Tomato growers' labor issues in South Florida
- Water and drought issues throughout Florida
- Budget cuts at IFAS
- Food Check-Out Week Observance

These efforts have resulted in the following media pickup:

- *Tampa Tribune* published tomato growers and water issues papers
- *Gainesville Sun* published paper on IFAS budget cuts
- *Lakeland Ledger* published paper on IFAS budget cuts
- *Orlando Business Journal* published portion of press release on Food Check-Out Week.

In addition, Consensus has conducted visits to agricultural opera-

On-line News Room Activated

AIF is pleased to unveil its new online news room (ONR) that can be found at www.aiflorida.org

Users who enter the site can create an account that will allow them to access certain areas of the ONR, such as the photo gallery. The goal of this on-line component is to unveil it to media statewide and nationwide as a one-stop shop for Florida agriculture news. Among the benefits to media are:

- Access to current industry-wide news releases, position papers and announcements
- RSS feed subscription to Florida agriculture news
- Subscription for news alerts and information
- Regular story tip sheet with a selection of story ideas
- Digital assets including video and photography

But we need help from all of you to help make it work.

Anytime AIF members send out a news release, media alert, announcement, newsletter and other items that media members might find helpful or interesting, please share it with us. All information can be sent to Geo Morales at geo@onmessage.com

tions throughout the state that are developing and/or implementing unique, innovative, or different approaches to daily operations.

Visits have been made to:

- Agri-Starts, Inc., Apopka
- Knox Nursery, Winter Garden

Awareness Campaign continued on page 4



The President's Report

Heather Nedley
hnedley@verizon.net

Thanks to everyone who has supported the Ag Institute of Florida (AIF) over the past six months by renewing membership dues, sponsoring the Ag Calendar and contributing to the media relations campaign. Membership dues are vital to this volunteer organization as we continue to bring collaborative efforts and services to the agriculture industry.

Ag Institute provides a service to the agriculture industry by keeping dates of industry conventions and meetings at your fingertips via the Ag Calendar. If you are planning an event that involves the agriculture industry, check out the Ag Calendar to avoid conflicts. Many industry meeting planners and organizations regularly consult the calendar before choosing dates for

their events. Many of these organizations have chosen to sponsor the calendar. Sponsor logos are displayed on the calendar web site in exchange for their support. To submit events to the Florida Ag Calendar simply visit www.floridaagcalendar.com ...

The industry media campaign, a collaborative effort spearheaded by the Ag institute, has been successful over the past eight months. This effort has initiated media outreach with position papers, industry outreach to place stories and issues management. A product of the campaign – the on-line news room – launched in mid-June. Look for this new feature via the Ag Institute website at www.aginstitute.org ...

This time of year we begin planning the Ag Institute annual meeting. This year's meeting will be held Oct. 8 in Orlando at the Peabody in conjunction with the Florida Farm Bureau Convention. Tim Center will be our luncheon guest speaker. Tim serves as Director of Sustainable Florida, an alliance of private and public partners committed to economic growth

and environmental stewardship to create a higher quality of life for this and future generations. His presentation on Florida sustainability will detail how agriculture can be a player. AIF also will announce this year's winner of the "AG-Vocate," our spokesperson of the year award. Details about AIF's annual meeting will be available on our website by early August. Save the date now! ...

These and other efforts benefiting our entire industry are possible due to the generous time volunteered by our industry's communications professionals. Your financial support is essential to help us continue this important work on behalf of Florida agriculture. If you would like more information about supporting Ag Institute through membership or a contribution to the media campaign, please contact me at (863) 533-0561 or hnedley@verizon.net.

Thank you again for supporting the Ag Institute of Florida!

Heather Nedley is Executive Director of Polk County Farm Bureau.

About The Ag Institute of Florida

Established in 1970, the Ag Institute of Florida is a non-profit organization serving as a communications resource for and about the state's agriculture industry. As the voice for Florida agriculture, the organization provides or sponsors political forums, informational publications to meet industry needs, and represents the industry in the areas of public relations, communications and issues management. AIF's membership includes a variety of agriculture-related businesses and institutions, along with colleges and universities, chambers of commerce, commodity groups, and financial institutions.

AIF Officers



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Casey Wohl Pace, Immediate Past President
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THE AG ROUNDUP

NEWS AND NOTES FROM THE AIF MEMBERSHIP

■ Farm Credit of Central Florida Chairman Al Bellotto announced **Reginald T. Holt** has been named **President and CEO** of the member-owned agricultural lender. Holt



Reginald T. Holt

joined Farm Credit in 1982, serving as a branch manager at East Carolina Farm Credit in Swan Quarter, N.C. In 1985, he transferred to the Farm Credit Bank of Columbia serving in various credit administration and audit positions until 1992 when he



Farm Credit of Central Florida

joined Farm Credit of Central Florida as Area Vice President. Since 1997, he has served as the association's Director Agribusiness Lending.

■ The Florida Turfgrass Association announced that **football legend Bill Bergey** will serve as **keynote speaker** during the association's annual meeting on Sept. 17. Bergey was a four-time all-pro selection and appeared in a Super Bowl with the Eagles. He remains close to the game, doing pre- and post-game radio and TV commentary for the Eagles.

The FTGA conference and show, scheduled Sept. 16-19 at the PGA Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, will emphasize the importance of accelerating attendees' business and future. For information, visit www.ftga.org or call (800) 882-6721.



■ Susan Howard, director of corporate communications for Duda, was named **Central Florida's 2008 Public Relations Professional of the Year** by the Florida Public Relations Association's Orlando chapter. The award recognizes a public relations professional who has made major contributions to the profession. Susan, a 15-year veteran employee of Duda, serves on a number of agriculture organizations, including the Agriculture Institute of Florida's board of directors and executive committee, the UF Agriculture and Education Department Advisory Committee, and the IFAS Marketing Advi-



Photo by Ron O'Connor

Come and get it!

Ronnie Simmons, Executive Director of FFA, prepares some of the scrumptious wild game for the FFA Beast Feast at the Leadership training Center on Lake Pierce near Haines City.

sory Committee. Howard also served on the Produce for Better Health Foundation's Communication Committee and is a founding member of the Redlands Christian Migrant Association Christmas card project committee. She is nationally accredited in public relations and serves on the board of FPRA.

■ The Marriott Corporation has announced that 34 of its golf resort properties will become **certified Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuaries** by the end of 2008. In order to achieve Audubon certification, a golf facility is required to demonstrate that it is maintaining the highest degree of environmental quality in several areas including environmental planning, wildlife and habitat management, outreach and education, chemical use reduction and safety, water conservation, and water quality management.



■ A North Central Florida elementary school teacher and two middle school agriculture teachers have won Florida Agriculture in the Classroom, Inc.'s 2008 **Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Awards** for their efforts to educate students about where food, fiber and landscape material come from. Cherith Davenport of Archer Community School near Gainesville won for the elementary and overall Florida level. Susan Carpenter of Mulrennan Middle School in Tampa won for the middle school agri-science level. Brent Douglas of High Springs Community School in North Central Florida, won for the middle school agri-science level. Davenport, a teacher of gifted students, competes for the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award.



Susan Howard of Duda, right, is presented the award for being named Central Florida's top PR professional of the year.

FFB Members March On Capitol For Immigration Reform Measures

More than 80 Florida Farm Bureau members marched up Capitol Hill and laid their farm labor woes at Congress' steps on May 13.

Carrying a sign that said, "Don't Tie Our Hands," and with hands bound with green yarn to symbolize how current immigration law and temporary worker programs hinder agricultural production, the Florida farmers said comprehensive immigration reform is the only real solution to their labor problems.

Comprehensive reform usually refers to legislation that creates legal avenues for people to enter the United States, enables those who are already here to earn legal status and improves security at the U.S. borders. For agriculture, it also includes an improved agricultural guest worker program.

Congress has not acted on immigration reform in more than two decades, and reform is long overdue, the FFB members said. They called for Congress to pass comprehensive reform this year.

After the demonstration, they fanned out for meetings with members of Congress on immigration and other issues. Farm Bureau members had made appointments to meet with Florida members of Congress or their staff liaisons as part of the group's annual "Field to the Hill" visit.

"We are here in the nation's capital to say that Congress must take action or else our hands as the nation's food producers are tied," said John L. Hoblick, FFB president. "If farmers don't have a system for hiring the labor we need, when we need it, at a fair market wage for the type of work that these workers

do, then we may lose fruit and vegetable production in Florida and the U.S."

Many of Florida's most profitable crops include fresh fruits, vegetables, flowers and nursery products, products that need to be hand harvested. But finding U.S. workers who are willing to do the work is harder than ever, and many farmers turn to workers from across the border to meet their labor needs.



FFB had a strong showing on Capitol Hill with a message about immigration and the impact on agriculture.

That has presented several problems, from not being able to verify the workers' legal immigration status, to not getting temporary workers when they are needed, to federal wage requirements that are out of whack with typical agricultural wages.

The American Farm Bureau Federation says billions of dollars worth of U.S. agricultural production, mostly in fresh fruits and vegetables, are at stake if Congress does not pass comprehensive immigration reform and provide an effective agricultural guest worker program.

"That means job losses, not only in agriculture but also in other industries that are connected with agriculture," said Hoblick. "Congress must address this economic issue."

Plum Creek Timber Company Provides New Home For Tortoises

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Plum Creek Timber Company took a major step to set up a new home for 1,781 gopher tortoises displaced by development.

A 570-acre site has been established within the Lochloosa Conservation Easement, near Orange Lake in Alachua County, for relocating tortoises.

"This new site is a pilot project to help us understand the logistics of providing desirable gopher tortoise habitat and implementation of the new FWC Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines," said Deborah Burr, Gopher Tortoise Plan coordinator.

These permitting guidelines were approved at the FWC's meeting April 9. Plum Creek received the FWC's first Recipient Site Permit after the approval process. Rob Hicks, senior resource forester from Plum Creek, was presented with the permit during a ceremony at the meeting.

"We are excited to be working with the FWC team on this pilot program to help designate a safe environment for relocating gopher tortoises," Hicks said. "Plum Creek has a history of creating these kinds of conservation agreements to provide for the long-term management and protection of wildlife habitat across the country."

In 2007, the gopher tortoise management plan was approved by the FWC. Prior to July 2007, tortoises could be relocated to such sites, or incidental take of the tortoises was allowed under a permit issued to the developer. Under an interim permitting system, the controversial take permits were discontinued last July.

Since the plan was approved, numerous stakeholders have worked with the FWC to develop new and more-appropriate guidelines for management of the species and permit requirements, Burr said.

The overall goal of the management plan is to restore and maintain secure, viable populations of gopher tortoises throughout the species' current range in Florida.

Plum Creek is the largest and most geographically diverse private landowner in the nation with more than 8 million

acres of timberlands in the United States. The company owns and manages more than 600,000 acres of forestland in 22 counties in Florida and is the second largest private landowner in the state.



More than 1,700 gopher tortoises have a new home within the Lochloosa Conservation Easement.

Florida Dairy Embraces Green Movement With Nutrient Stream Management

Editor's note: the following is a news release that has been sent to media members as part of the Ag Institute of Florida's awareness campaign.

BRANFORD – Dairy Production Systems (DPS) of Branford, Florida is one of the only dairies in the state to house a complete nutrient management center on its premises.

The system allows DPS to convert all of the waste from its dairy operations into a viable nutrient stream to enhance its crop development division and protect the environment from harmful contaminant levels.

"This method of nutrient management provides a significant environmental benefit and a

dramatic improvement in the health of our cows, daily milk production and milk quality," said David Sumrall, president and CEO. "It is a classic example of a reduce, reuse and recycle approach that enhances operations and improves the bottom line."



Sumrall

The system works by efficiently separating solid waste from liquid waste and converting it into a stable, nutrient-rich compost that is then used to enrich soil used for crop production – a conservation practice that consumes considerably less energy than peat mining, processing and transportation. The liquid

attained from the process is reused for irrigation, reducing the dairy farm's reliance on water drawn from the Florida Aquifer.

Adding to the system's environmental advantages, nitrogen and phosphorous in the nutrient stream are reduced to levels surpassing standards set by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, resulting in greater protection of nearby land and water sources.

DPS' Branford operation serves as a model for its other operations in Florida and around the country as efforts continue to focus on being an efficient dairy producer, a good neighbor and a steward of the environment.

For more information, visit www.dpsdairy.com

You Can Be a Cowboy, But You Still Have To Go To Town

By Dr. David M. Kohl

This article's title comes from Al Bellotto, a long-time board member of Farm Credit of Central Florida. The gentleman, who is full of wisdom, is 83 years of age, a veteran of World War II, and was part of the team that fired the first shots of Iwo Jima. His comment is very thought provoking as agriculture goes under considerable change and scrutiny worldwide.

As farmers and ranchers, we will be challenged to represent our industry at all levels, including local, regional, state, national and international.

Let's start with the local level. This often entails dealing with issues such as property development rights and the urban/suburban producer interface. Some will look at this as a threat, but as Al says, "Maybe there is opportunity if one looks at the cup half-full."

At the regional and state levels, issues pertaining to water and mineral rights, and

regulation including food safety and security, reporting, and paperwork are necessary evils. Keeping bureaucrats and technocrats within reason is an educational program in itself.

At the national level, a majority of our citizens and politicians have no connection with agriculture. Approximately 80 percent of Americans are now two generations away from the farm or ranch. They often see agriculture as a contributor to challenges and problems such as global warming, animal welfare, etc. Dialogue will not be an option but a requirement that hopefully empowers the younger generation.

Finally, at the international level, the food versus fuel and food scarcity issues are becoming headlines with no quick fix. A balanced approach will be necessary to prevent economic and social turbulence, both abroad and here on home soil.

Perhaps our biggest chal-

lenge will be finding the time to articulate a balanced perspective concerning our industry. If we don't, future "Al's" may be firing shots not only to protect our livelihood but our country and way of life as well.



Al Bellotto

Al Bellotto is a Lakeland cattle rancher and citrus grower who also is Chairman of the Farm Credit of Central Florida Board of Directors. During his entire career, he has been a strong and persistent advocate for Florida agriculture. His philosophy on the need to be politically involved on behalf of Florida agriculture is defined by his catchphrase, "You Can Be a Cowboy, But You Still Have to Go To Town Sometime." The article was written by Dr. David Kohl from Virginia Tech University.

Awareness Campaign continued from page 1

- Dairy Production Systems, Belle
- Deroose Plants, Apopka

The visit to Knox Nursery resulted in positive media pickup in *The Orlando Sentinel*. AIF and Consensus Communications representatives were able to learn some insights while at the nursery and contacted the *Sentinel* reporter and pitched the story. A couple of weeks later, the reporter visited Knox and brought a photographer. The story was published May 5 with the headline: "Knox Nursery, an Orlando-area agribusiness, finds high-tech ways to meet the challenge."



Photo by Ron O'Connor

Knox Nursery was the focus of an *Orlando Sentinel* story that was the result of AIF media campaign efforts.

Survey says ...

Results are in from the Florida Department of Agriculture promotion campaign survey

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, in tandem with the Florida Farm Bureau, conducted a survey to ascertain Floridians' opinions on food safety, affordability, pricing and farming practices.

In March and April of 2008, hundreds of randomly selected Floridians 18 years and older were surveyed (95% confidence level).

The Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign (FAPC), also known as "Fresh from Florida," promotes more than 280 agricultural commodities grown in the Sunshine State through a variety of promotions including the Florida Farm Bureau.

Among the key summaries of the survey:

■ While the percentages are only around 25%, a significant number seeks out Florida grown products as well as locally grown products when they shop. Florida residents are concerned about a safe and stable food supply.

■ A large number are more concerned today than they were a year ago about the family food budget reflecting the economic downturn nationally. Florida residents feel products grown in the state are safe when compared to imported products.

■ Television and newspapers are the two primary sources of information for news. Respondents generally felt Florida farmers were concerned about their impact on the environment. There was strong support for allowing legal workers from other countries to work as temporary farm employees.

■ Just under 30% were aware of the phrase, "Safe, affordable and abundant: Food for thought from Florida's farmers." A majority feels Florida farmers should produce crops that can be used as sources for alternative fuels, such as bio-diesel, bio-gas and ethanol.



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