

## Emerging Leaders kick off yearlong program at FFVA 2011



The 2011-2012 inaugural class of the Emerging Leader Development Program. From L to R: April Roe Porter, Andy Ballard, Justin Roberson, Jennifer Hodges (front), Heather Banky, Michael Hill, Rachel Walters (front), Rob Atchley, Adam Trott, Elizabeth Malek.

The inaugural class of the Emerging Leadership Development Program was introduced to FFVA's membership during the awards luncheon at FFVA 2011. This was the first step in a yearlong program that will include meetings with legislators, issues seminars, and visits to agricultural operations.

"This is an exciting new program for us, as we are significantly investing in the future of FFVA and the specialty crop industry overall," said Sonia Tighe, executive director of the Florida Specialty Crop Foundation. "The Foundation is administering the program on behalf of FFVA. One of the main objectives set forth in the new strategic plan for the Foundation is to enhance the lives of young people pursuing careers in agriculture. This program certainly supports that objective."

The program is designed to provide participants with the education and tools to become effective advocates for specialty crop agriculture.

### Group gets to see leadership personified



by Heather Banky  
U.S. Sugar Corporation

The ELDP had the great honor of spending exclusive time at FFVA's annual convention with three great leaders: Mike Stuart, Butch Calhoun and Barbara Mainster. Mike Stuart, FFVA President, welcomed the inaugural class and spoke about the importance of developing the next generation of leadership that will be needed to keep our industry thriving into the future. He promised a year of learning, experiences and memorable people.



Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam and UF/IFAS Senior Vice President Jack Payne were among those participating in this year's State of the Industry panel.

Butch Calhoun, the director of government relations for FFVA, provided a recap of 2011 state legislative issues and highlights including the successful override of then-Gov. Charlie Crist's vetoes to put two pieces of legislation critical to agriculture into law: HB981 (protects greenbelt classification) and HB7103 (prohibits county government from imposing storm water fees on properties that are already regulated). In 2012 Florida will go through reapportionment and re-drawing of voting districts, a process that will require every member of the Legislature to run for re-election in newly drawn districts. This could mean losses of key political allies.

Immigration, immigration, immigration will be the hottest topic of 2012, with water management taking close second. Both areas have proposed legislation threatening to negatively impact the ag industry. In response to an audience question on where mandatory E-verify is, Calhoun said he feels very strongly it will not pass in Florida. He cited the passionate opposition on the floor of the Legislature by Sen. J.D. Alexander, where the issue was put into personal perspective, as one of the main reasons. That passionate outcry coupled with the recent issues with implementation of the program in Georgia that devastated the ag industry there should keep Florida safe from the E-verify for the time being, he said.

Barbara Mainster spoke from the heart about the non-profit organization she leads, Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA), and touted that 95 percent of people

served are ag workers' children. The programs are in 21 Florida counties where over 8,000 children are served per day (two-thirds of which are infants and toddlers). The staff, which must be from the community that the facility is serving, receives ongoing education to ensure high level care and service is always provided. Ms. Mainster put faces to the immigration issue by sharing a slide show of who benefits from the programs and gave a gentle reminder that while the parents of the kids that are served may not be U.S. citizens, the children are. The emerging leaders received their first challenge: our industry needs these workers in order to survive, and we need to speak up for what is important.

While each speaker provided insight into his or her respective areas of concern and the topics that should be foremost in all of our minds, what also should be taken away from each of them are lessons they are giving us on how to be leaders:

- A whole lot can be done if we work together
- We have to speak up for what is important
- Get involved – communicate and educate those around you
- Relationships and partnerships make a difference
- Understand we may lose some fights the first time, but if we want to win badly enough, go back at it again and again.

## Opinion leaders address the state of the industry



by Rob Atchley  
A. Duda & Sons

Labor concerns and water policy dominated the 2011 FFVA Convention, and the opening State of the Industry panel discussion was no exception. The panel consisted of Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam, University of Florida Senior Vice President Dr. Jack Payne, Florida Farm Bureau President John Hoblick, United Fresh Produce Association President Tom Stenzel, and producer Tony DiMare. The discussion was moderated by FFVA President Mike Stuart.

Labor availability, E-Verify, and the shortfalls of the H-2A program were large concerns of the group. The need for a functional guest worker program for agriculture is a major concern. Water policy came in a close second. Water quality has always been a concern in areas of the state. The panel urged attendees to view policy as a statewide problem in light of new EPA criteria for water quality. Input costs continue to be a concern with diesel fuel, fertilizer, and labor costs driving up overall production costs. Finally, Tony DiMare pointed out the continued need to differentiate Florida produce from other areas of the nation and the world.

Shifting gears, the panel pointed out success stories in the industry. Moving the school lunch program from the Department of Education to the Department of Agriculture was viewed by all as a positive move for utilization of fresh Florida produce. The University of Florida was also praised. The release of new tomato and blueberry varieties gives producers an edge growing and perhaps marketing Florida produce. The discussion ended having recognized our current and future challenges but reaffirming the persistence and positive attitude of the Florida farmer.





FFVA 2011 keynote speaker Scott Rasmussen shared his insight on the next presidential election.

## E-verify, immigration polarizing issues



by Elizabeth Malek  
Glades Crop Care

E-Verify is a U.S. system for employers to check the legal status of employees. Employers are required to submit Social Security numbers and corresponding names to be run through a database. "No-match" letters and notifications of imposters are sent to employers, but responses take more than five to six weeks. Currently the system is only set up to handle 4 percent of the U.S. workforce. Also, employers can be audited by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and required to submit I-9 forms for foreign employees. Penalties for paperwork violations are skyrocketing; for example, an I-9 form that is improperly filled out can cost a business \$10,000 to 15,000 per violation, up from the previous amount of \$1,000. Now, states are beginning to pass E-Verify laws on their own. Florida's Legislature voted down the bill last session.

E-Verify increases the burden of government regulation on agricultural businesses. During this time of economic hardship, over taxation, an uncertain future, more regulation might be what breaks some agricultural businesses, besides the fact that there might not be a labor workforce in the near future for farmers. Is there a future for labor-intensive agriculture

in Florida? Maybe, if we can communicate our needs effectively with our local, state, and federal governments. One thing is certain, illegal immigration is a polarizing issue that few politicians want to compromise on, but without a guest worker program, Florida farmers may not succeed and Florida's economy will be greatly impacted. There is, however, a glimmer of hope: Florida has a loud and united voice for agriculture in FFVA. We just need to be heard.



ELDP members listen intently as industry experts address many important issues concerning Florida agriculture.



The ELDP was the beneficiary of the FFVA 2011 Benefit Auction, which raised \$15,440.

## Experts discuss water policy in Florida



by Jennifer Hodges  
The Andersons  
Plant Nutrient Group

One panel discussion at FFVA 2011 began with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) numeric nutrient criteria. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection continues to actively work with EPA on these water quality standards. Several public workshops addressing these topics have been held with great attendance. In my opinion, the most important and effective way for our industry's voice to be heard is to attend these type of events.

Water supply and consumption were also on the agenda for discussion. "Long-term water supply is the biggest issue we face," said Florida Department of Agriculture Director of Water Policy Rich Budell. Budell also mentioned that we need a level playing field in educating the legislators on the important sources of water (ground/surface) that need to be available. The water level of Lake Okeechobee was talked about several times as well. Three to four inches added to the lake would make a huge difference; the water management district officials planned to meet on November 8, 2011, to discuss this issue. Using land swaps and existing infrastructure, rather than taking other land out of production, is one of the solutions the South Florida Water Management District plans to discuss with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

It is clear that water will always be a critical issue in our industry and to the population in general. We were fortunate to have such an insightful group of speakers to update us on this important topic and the current status of these issues.



## Food safety: Is it worth it?



by Andy Ballard  
Hundley Farms

At the recent FFVA convention, Dr. Martha Roberts moderated a session with Jim Gorny, FDA senior advisor for produce safety, entitled "Food Safety and the FDA: Where Do We Go From Here?" The passing of the Food Safety Modernization Act will enable the FDA to:

1. Focus on prevention instead of responding to contamination after the fact
2. Have the ability to issue recalls instead of relying on voluntary recalls by manufacturers and distributors
3. Conduct more frequent inspections on high risk areas and increase regulations on imported foods
4. Focus on science to create ways of safe production and harvesting of fruits and vegetables
5. Protect small businesses and farms with some exemptions from produce and safety standards (roadside stands and farmer's markets)
6. Allow FDA the ability to gather information to properly write the food safety regulation, which will be implemented early next year
7. Protect the public health and reduce food-borne illnesses

Some suggestions regarding implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act were:

- Mandating the packing houses to have a concrete plan to put into effect when contamination occurs. Quick tracking allows for prompt response and location of contaminated field.
- Increasing inspection of imported foods to U.S. standards. FDA has the authority to reject any imported foods that deny an inspection.

Most repercussions mentioned pertained to budgeting and the

financial strain that will occur by increasing standards. Without implementation of the law, there could potentially be a huge financial loss to farmers if they battled a late reaction to contamination.



The group was recognized during FFVA 2011's annual Awards Luncheon.



Members had some time to relax, network and get to know each other.



ELDP members discuss the events of convention at the closing dinner.

## Cracker Breakfast features pollster Scott Rasmussen



by Michael Hill  
Lakeshore Growers

This year's annual FFVA Cracker Breakfast was very memorable; not only for my classmates and I, as it was our first meeting as ELDP members, but for all the members of FFVA as well. Scott Rasmussen was this year's keynote speaker, and the topic was the current state of our nation's political environment. Rasmussen enlightened us with some depressing statistics throughout his speech. "Only 53 percent of Americans say that capitalism is better than socialism. Of Americans under 30, only one third chose capitalism to be better, one third chose socialism, and one third didn't know." In 2008, 43 percent of Americans felt their finances were good; today only 31 percent of Americans feel the same, Rasmussen said. In the past three elections voters have gone against the party in office, and there is a very good chance this will happen in 2012, he said.

The ELDP class met for the first time at the 2011 convention, and I feel like it has already made a noticeable impact on me and my career. I strive to be successful and progressive in the agricultural industry, and it is great to be able to share these aspirations with my peers. I look forward to the road ahead as a member of ELDP, and thank the FFVA for the giving me the opportunity to help me reach my goals as well as theirs.

**The class recently finished its first seminar, which took place at the FFVA office. Look for those stories in the next issue!**