

Project Title: Exploring Our Environment: The Everglades Agricultural Area

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Project Collaborator(s): Ron Rice, Agronomic Crops Agent, Palm Beach County Extension; The Palm Beach County Agricultural and Natural Resource Advisory Committee (including agricultural industry representatives, UF/IFAS Everglades Research and Education Center faculty, environmental educators and interested citizens); Darrin Parmenter, former Vegetable Agent, Palm Beach County Extension; and Les Baucum, former Regional Sugarcane/Agronomic Crops Agent, Hendry County Extension.

Abstract: The Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) is located primarily in Palm Beach County, Florida, south of Lake Okeechobee. The 700,000 acre area is one of the most important agricultural areas in Florida and nationwide. Due to its connection to the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee, it is also one of the most environmentally managed areas in the country. This project aims to increase citizen awareness and understanding of the crops grown in the EAA, the environmental and economic significance of this area, agricultural best management practices, and how stormwater treatment areas filter agricultural runoff before entering the Everglades. Funding was provided for “*The Everglades Agricultural Area: A Self-Guided Tour*” publication and the exhibit “*Exploring Our Environment: The Everglades Agricultural Area*”. The publication will be distributed and the exhibit displayed for 17 days at the 2008 South Florida

Fair. Over 5,000 Florida residents and visitors will increase their awareness and knowledge of this important agricultural area. After the fair, the exhibit will be used for future educational programs and community events.

Project Goals: This project aims to increase citizen awareness and understanding of the crops grown in the EAA, the environmental and economic significance of this area, agricultural best management practices, and how stormwater treatment areas filter agricultural runoff before entering the Everglades.

Project Activities

- (1) Write, design, and print *The Everglades Agricultural Area: A Self-Guided Tour* and;
- (2) Write, design, and print the educational exhibit *Exploring Our Environment: The Everglades Agricultural Area*.
- (3) The publication will be distributed and the exhibit displayed for 17 days at the 2008 South Florida Fair in West Palm Beach, January 18 through February 3.

Recipients/Benefactors of the Awareness Program: The South Florida Fair is the largest fair in Florida with over 580,000 attending in 2007. Based on citizen contact data from previous exhibits displayed and staffed at the fair, we expect at least 5,000 Florida residents and visitors will increase their awareness and knowledge of this important agricultural area. After the 2008 South Florida Fair, the exhibit will be used for future educational programs and community events.

Outcomes and Deliverables: “*The Everglades Agricultural Area: A Self-Guided Tour*” was professionally designed by the project leader, collaborators, and IFAS Communications. The guide is printed on 11” by 17” paper and folds to brochure size. Approximately 5000 Florida residents and visitors will receive the color brochure at the 2008 South Florida Fair.

Additionally, more than 5,000 Florida residents and visitors will view four large vertical exhibit banners professionally designed by the project leader, collaborators, and IFAS Communications. Topics include: Where is the EAA?; What is “black gold” soil?; What crops are grown in the EAA?; What wildlife can be found in the EAA? A tabletop exhibit board will provide additional information about UF/IFAS Palm Beach County Extension and a publication stand will display additional factsheets.

Description of Effectiveness/Impact: At selected times during the fair a brief citizen survey will be conducted to document increased awareness and knowledge gained about the Everglades Agricultural Area. For those participating in the survey, we plan to have a drawing for prizes donated by local farmers. Examples may include a box of fresh vegetables, gift certificates to attend an Everglades Agricultural Tour offered by the Clewiston Chamber of Commerce, and local agricultural books. Survey results will be submitted by January 31, 2008.