

EXTENSION

STRIKES

Quarterly Newsletter

Winter /Spring 2026 Edition



4-H Youth Development | Agricultural & Natural Resources | Community Resource Development | Youth, Family & Community

Message from the Director



The role of taking the University to the People is the foundation of FAMU Cooperative Extension as the outreach arm of the University's land-grant mission. A thriving Florida economy will require empowered and well-informed citizens and workers. FAMU Cooperative Extension puts knowledge to work in pursuit of economic profitability and sustainability as well as social well-being. We bring experience and research-based solutions to help individuals, families and communities thrive in Florida's ever-changing economy.

An expanded knowledge base, innovations for families, farmers, and business leaders, positive leadership and development for youth, and community and economic development opportunities are just part of FAMU Cooperative Extension's approach to meet challenges and make contributions to the state of Florida and the world that are bold and exceed all expectations. As a unit of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service, FAMU is also a cooperative partner with USDA National Institute of Agriculture, University of Florida Institute of Food & Agriculture (1862), and state and local entities.

-Vonda Richardson, Extension Director/Administrator



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COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SCIENCES

Stay Connected with FAMU Cooperative Extension. Catch up on the latest highlights in our quarterly report, featuring new programs, success stories, and impactful outreach efforts. FAMU Cooperative Extension remains dedicated to empowering farmers, ranchers, producers, seniors, youth, entrepreneurs, small business owners, and rural and urban communities across Florida.

Together, we're growing stronger communities—one initiative at a time.

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Extension Strikes Quarterly Newsletter

Winter/Spring 2026 Edition

Extension Strikes Quarterly Newsletter

Published electronically by FAMU Cooperative Extension

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Front Cover: Adobe Stock Photos

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2026 Community Garden Days

Coleman Park Community Garden

1116 21st Street

West Palm Beach, FL 33407

Tuesdays: 9 AM—11 AM

January 13, January 20

February 10, February 24

March 10, March 24

***Saturday, February 7, 9AM-11 AM**

Pleasant City Community Garden

2147 Spruce Avenue

West Palm Beach, FL 33407

Thursdays: 2 PM—4 PM

January 15, January 22

February 12, February 26

March 12, March 26

***Saturday, March 14th—9 AM-11AM**

Please note: Dates are subject to weather conditions

For more information, contact event organizer, Ms. Tavia Gordon at tavia.gordon@famu.edu or (561) 804-4979.



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FAMU Extension Agent Donna Arnold Selected as Speaker for 2026 ESA Southeastern Branch Meeting

Contributor: Amelia Davis

Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension proudly congratulates Donna Arnold, Small Farms & Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Gadsden County, on her selection as a featured speaker at the 2026 Entomological Society of America (ESA) Southeastern Branch Meeting in Hilton Head this March.

Ms. Arnold will share her expertise on blending traditional communication tools with modern outreach strategies to strengthen the connection between science and stakeholders. Her innovative approach enhances engagement with farmers, homeowners, and community partners while ensuring research-based information remains accessible, practical, and relevant.

In addition to presenting, she will collaborate with Extension professionals from across the Southeastern region, contributing to meaningful discussions on advancing science-based solutions through teamwork, shared expertise, and responsive communication. Her session supports this year's conference theme, "A Century of Innovations Addressing Global Challenges in a Hyperconnected World," by showcasing how Extension programs continue to adapt and innovate within today's rapidly evolving agricultural and communication landscape.

FAMU Cooperative Extension is proud to recognize Ms. Arnold's leadership and her dedication to serving communities through impactful, research-driven outreach.

Congratulations, Donna!

Donna Arnold is the Small Farms and Residential Extension Agent, located in Gadsden County, Florida, Donna can be reached at donna.arnold@fam.u.edu.

Photo credit: Jalen Williams, FAMU Extension

Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension Partners with Venom Foundation to Support Jamaican Hurricane Survivors

Contributor: Angel Forde, Ph.D.

In a strong demonstration of compassion and community partnership, Florida A&M University's Cooperative Extension has teamed up with the Venom Foundation Incorporated to coordinate a clothing drive for Jamaican residents devastated by Hurricane Melissa.

The effort, led by Dr. Angel Forde, FAMU Extension Agent, began with the collection of clothing donations from supporters across the local community. Donated items were delivered to FAMU's Teleconference Center, where volunteers sorted and inspected each piece to ensure that only clean, high-quality garments were sent. After a careful vetting process, the clothing was packed and prepared for shipment to Jamaica.

Once on the island, donations will be distributed through Abundant Life Ministry Church, a key relief partner working on the ground. The clothing will reach residents in several hard-hit communities, including Bounty Hall, Wakefield, Bunkers Hill, Deeside, and Grandville, all of which suffered significant damage during Hurricane Melissa.

Organizers stressed the power of partnership during times of crisis.

"This collaboration reflects our commitment to extending a helping hand beyond borders," said Dr. Forde. "Every contribution helps restore hope and dignity to families who have lost so much."

Hurricane Melissa struck Jamaica as a catastrophic Category 5 storm, unleashing torrential rainfall, destructive winds, and widespread flooding. Thousands of residents were displaced, homes and infrastructure were severely damaged, and many families were left without basic necessities. Although recovery efforts are underway, the need for humanitarian support remains critical. Clothing donations are

expected to bring immediate comfort as communities work toward long-term recovery.

FAMU Cooperative Extension Director Vonda Richardson also underscored the personal impact of the disaster.

"Two of our Extension Agents lived through the hurricane while visiting the island. Each of us has a responsibility to reach out and help our brothers and sisters affected by disasters. In past years, it has been us and our loved ones needing someone to step in," Richardson shared.

The initiative serves as a reminder of the importance of service, empathy, and collective action. Community members and organizations are encouraged to stay engaged and support ongoing efforts to rebuild lives and strengthen resilience in the regions most affected.



Dr. Angel Forde, FAMU Extension Agent (Faculty) with Venom Foundation representative picking up the donations from the FAMU Teleconference Center in Tallahassee, FL. (Photo credit: Sabrina Hayes, Ph.D.)

WILL PACKER PERFORMING ARTS AMPHITHEATER



FAMU
**HARAMBEE
FESTIVAL**
INSPIRING UNITY IN THE COMMUNITY

SAVE ^{THE} DATE

February 28, 2026



Visit
Tallahassee
Pretty Unexpected

Marketing Strategies for Beef Producers

Contributor: David Jones

Marketing beef cattle presents a unique blend of challenges and opportunities in today's evolving agricultural landscape. Whether you operate a small ranch or manage a large-scale herd, a variety of strategies are available to help maximize profits. Understanding the full spectrum of marketing options—from traditional auction barns to modern digital and direct-to-consumer channels—can significantly influence both your profitability and long-term success in the cattle industry.

Traditional Marketing Methods

Auction barns and livestock markets remain popular among small-scale farmers, while larger operations often incorporate a wider range of traditional methods, including direct sales to packers and participation in video or online auctions. Monitoring sale reports is a common practice, helping producers gauge market trends and determine when prices are rising or declining. Selling directly to a packer often results in higher profit margins but may require meeting contract volume premiums. Video and online auctions, such as those used in the Western Video Market, broaden access to a nationwide pool of buyers and increase competitive bidding. (FarmstandApp, 2025)

Modern Digital Marketing Strategies

Digital platforms give cattle producers new opportunities to reach buyers and highlight their livestock. Social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) allow farmers to advertise available cattle using high-quality photos that help build trust and buyer interest. Sharing information about herd health protocols and farm management practices further strengthens credibility, helping buyers feel confident that the animals are well cared for. (FarmstandApp, 2025)

Direct Marketing

Direct marketing enables cattle producers to sell beef straight from the farm, whether as individual cuts or larger portions such as quarters and halves. Customers often want assurance that the farmer uses good practices and produces high-quality beef, making

relationship-building a key factor. When trust is established, buyers are more likely to return year after year.

Building Customer and Processor Relationships

Strong relationships with both processors and customers are essential for long-term success in direct beef marketing. Starting small—selling only a few animals at a time—allows both groups to become familiar with your operation and ensures that all harvested beef is sold. Seeking feedback from customers and processors can provide valuable insight into what is working well and what may need improvement. In some cases, working with more than one processor can help meet customer expectations, particularly when selling whole carcasses, halves, or quarters.

Positive relationships across the entire supply chain help keep a direct-marketing enterprise running smoothly. (Hartfiel, 2025)

Summary

In conclusion, producers have multiple methods available for marketing beef cattle. The key is selecting the approach that aligns with the operation's goals, ensures profitability, and supports consistent long-term success. No matter the marketing pathway, a strong nutrition program, sound herd-health practices, safe farm procedures, and accurate recordkeeping are essential foundations for presenting a high-quality set of cattle to any market. Positive relationships across the entire supply chain help keep a direct-marketing enterprise running smoothly. (Hartfiel, 2025)

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FarmstandApp. (2025). 10 Proven Methods to Market Beef Cattle for Maximum Profit. Retrieved from Farmstand App: <https://www.farmstandapp.com/3643/what-are-the-methods-of-marketing-beef-cattle/>

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Spotlight on Extension Achievement



Amelia C. Davis

Amelia C. Davis Appointed to North Florida Fair Board of Directors

Florida A&M University (FAMU) Cooperative Extension congratulates Amelia C. Davis, MBA, on her appointment as a member to the Board of Directors for the North Florida Fair.

Davis currently serves as an Extension Agent III/ Communications Education with FAMU Cooperative Extension, where she specializes in agricultural communications and marketing. Ms. Davis is also the creator and editor of the FAMU *Extension Strikes* newsletter. She has been a dedicated member of the FAMU Extension team since 2011, serving from January 2011 through July 2022 and returning to the organization in August 2024.

A Tallahassee native, Davis brings both professional expertise and personal connection to her new role. She credits her lifelong familiarity with the North Florida Fair and her extensive experience working with agricultural organizations as preparation for board service. Through her appointment, she aims to represent Florida A&M University while serving as an advocate for the broader community.

Davis is a proud alumna of Florida A&M University, having earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Economics in 1995. She later obtained a Master of Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing from Capella University. In addition, she holds professional certifications in Women's Entrepreneurship and Public Health Essentials from Cornell University.

FAMU Cooperative Extension recognizes Davis for her continued leadership, service, and commitment to advancing agriculture, education, and community engagement through her professional and civic contributions.

Trails and Nature

Let us get back to it!

Join us as we return to trail and mindfulness walks.

Every third Sunday of the month.

Our first walk for the year will be

February 15, 2026

3 PM

Tom Brown Park

501 Easterwood Drive

Tallahassee, FL 32311

** We will meet at the Centennial Playground to begin our walk.*

***Please dress comfortable, bring water, sunscreen and journal.*

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FAMU Extension Engages Youth at South Florida Fair with Ag-Explorations

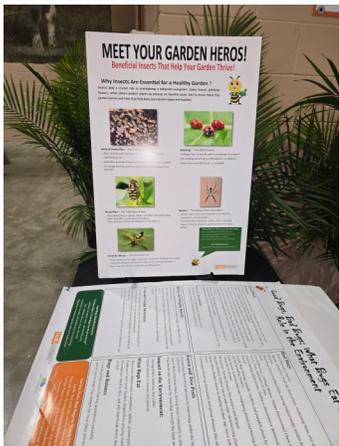
Contributor: Tavia Gordon

FAMU Extension kicked off the South Florida Fair with its interactive Ag-Explorations: Good Bugs, Bad Bugs booth, led by Tavia Gordon, FAMU Extension Agent for Urban Agriculture in West Palm Beach. The booth drew strong participation from students and families eager to explore the fascinating and important role insects play in agriculture and the environment.

Participants learned about beneficial insects such as pollinators, including honeybees and butterflies, as well as natural predators like ladybird beetles. Hands-on activities also introduced youth to entomophagy, the practice of eating insects, and highlighted insects as a sustainable, protein-rich alternative to traditional animal protein sources.

FAMU Extension will continue engaging fairgoers with interactive learning experiences at the Livestock Show Arena, located next to the Agri-Plex Pavilion. We extend a sincere thank you to everyone who visited the booth and helped make the first day a success.

Day One



Day Two



Photos courtesy of Tavia Gordon



From The Field: 4-H Insights



Life, Liberty, and Livestock Club Learns about Hay Production

Monticello, FL-

Contributor: Emily Nolen

On January 15th, 2026, the Jefferson County 4-H Club “Life, Liberty, and Livestock” visited a local hay farmer to learn more about the machinery used in hay production. The Bridges family was kind enough to take the youth on a tour of their barn and property and explained how to grow, cut, and bale hay for livestock. This year the livestock club asked to learn more about the large machinery that helps make the production of agricultural products possible. With this month’s focus being on hay production the youth learned about how to start and maintain a successful hay business.

The 4-Hers learned about all the difference tractors and attachments that need to be used in order to produce round bales of hay for mainly cattle consumption. While the Bridges family was talking about what all goes into making hay bales the youth were able to see all the difference pieces of equipment and how they operate in order to better understand the hay production process.



Students learning various steps of hay production..

Photos courtesy of Emily Nolen

FAMU 4-H Inspire Hands-On Learning and Healthy Choices in Gadsden County Schools

Gadsden County FL

Contributor: Crystalgale Hunter

The Florida A&M University (FAMU) 4-H Youth Development Program brought learning to life in classrooms across Gadsden County this week through a series of dynamic, in-school educational experiences focused on science exploration, healthy living, and positive youth development.

Through FAMU 4-H Youth Development programming, kindergarten students enthusiastically explored the world of Junior Entomology, while fifth-grade students dove into engaging Earth Science activities. Using hands-on investigations, students examined insects, ecosystems, and environmental connections building critical thinking and observation skills while experiencing 4-H’s signature “learning by doing” approach.

Middle school students participated in interactive lessons on healthy living and healthy decision-making, powered by the Health Rocks! curriculum. Guided through the 4-H framework, these activities

encouraged youth to reflect on everyday choices related to nutrition, personal wellness, and lifestyle habits, helping them recognize how decisions made today can positively influence their future success.

FAMU 4-H is committed to meeting youth where they are inside classrooms and within their communities by delivering hands-on learning opportunities that are both meaningful and engaging. These in-school programs empower students to build confidence, develop essential life skills, and discover their unique sparks and interests.

These efforts reflect FAMU Extension’s mission to support youth, families, and communities through education while reinforcing the core 4-H focus areas of healthy living, science, and youth development. Through strong partnerships with local schools, FAMU 4-H continues to equip students across Gadsden County with the knowledge, skills, and inspiration they need to thrive today and tomorrow.



Young Voices Shine at the 2025 Jefferson County 4-H Speech Contest

Monticello, FL

Contributor: Emily Nolen



Pictured left to right: Petra Brookens, Dr. Camille Lewis, Morgan Kelly, Bruce Denson, and Emily Nolen.

On December 2, 2025, the Jefferson County 4-H Speech Contest concluded with more than 15 youth participants showcasing their confidence, creativity, and communication skills. This year's contest highlighted the impressive talent of Jefferson County 4-H members, with speech topics ranging widely and some of the most powerful presentations rooted in personal life experiences.

The event was hosted by Aucilla Christian Academy in its spacious auditorium, complete with an excellent sound system that supported students as they delivered their speeches. Each participant was allotted two to three minutes to present a well-developed speech on a chosen topic. Speeches were evaluated not only on written content, but also on delivery, organization, and overall presentation skills.

Judging the competition was no easy task for judges Shauntavia Clinton, Cetta Barnhart, and Emily Nolen, as many of the youth exceeded expectations with thoughtful, engaging, and beautifully written speeches.

The contest featured two divisions based on grade level: the 4th–5th grade division and the 6th grade division. The winners for each division are listed below:

4th–5th Grade Division

- **1st Place:** Alden Cruce — *“My Family’s Citrus Farm”*
- **2nd Place:** Kiara FitzGerald — *“The Albuquerque Balloon Festival: An Explosion of Color”*
- **3rd Place:** Erilyn Scott — *“Michael Jackson”*

6th Grade Division

- **1st Place:** Elynn Lago — *“Dreams”*
- **2nd Place:** Ty’avion Crumity — *“The Power of Kindness”*
- **3rd Place:** Rylan Rabon — *“Trouble”*

Special recognition is also extended to the members of the Jefferson County Teen Council for their assistance with event setup, managing competition score sheets, and post-event cleanup. Their support played an important role in the success of the contest.

Emily Nolen is the FAMU 4-H Extension agent for Jefferson County

Photo courtesy of Jefferson County 4-H Teen Council members assisting at the event.



Built at the Lunch Table: How the 4-H Champions Club Is Developing Young Leaders Across Five Counties

Brooksville, FL

Contributor: Terrance Cole



Terrance Cole, FAMU 4-H Extension Agent, along with the 4-H Champions Club members, enjoying their time as they take in the sites at the college basketball game they attended.

Transformation does not always happen on a stage or behind a podium. Sometimes, it happens in the most unexpected places—between bites of a school lunch.

That is where the 4-H Champions Club is making its impact.

The Champions Club is an in-school 4-H enrichment and mentoring program designed specifically for middle school boys, many of whom participate on school basketball teams at Academy Prep, Stewart Middle School, and ICON Middle School. Held during lunch periods, the program intentionally meets students where they already are, turning an everyday moment into an opportunity for leadership development, mentorship, and personal growth.

Rather than traditional lectures or formal presentations, the Champions Club focuses on authentic conversations that challenge students to think critically about their choices, their character, and their future. Basketball serves as the entry point, but life and career readiness are the ultimate lessons.

The program draws natural connections between athletics and real-world skills. Students learn that the same discipline required to complete drills when tired translates to perseverance in the classroom. Trust built among teammates mirrors the importance of healthy relationships, and learning to accept coaching on the court prepares them to receive guidance and correction in life. Through this framework, sports become a mirror for purpose and personal responsibility.

One of the most impactful experiences of the year occurred when select student leaders attended a local Division II college basketball game. While the game itself was exciting, the true highlight came afterward, when college athletes met directly with the students. The players spoke candidly about their journeys, sharing stories of setbacks, discipline, late nights, and resilience. For many participants, it was the first time college athletes had spoken to them not as spectators, but as future leaders.

That level of exposure does more than inspire—it reshapes expectations and broadens what students believe is possible for themselves.

Through initiatives like the Champions Club, 4-H Brooksville continues to positively impact youth across five counties. By embedding mentorship into the school day, the program transforms overlooked moments into meaningful opportunities for growth. Lunch becomes leadership training. School becomes a launchpad. And young men begin to see themselves not merely as survivors of circumstance, but as active builders of their own futures.

This is what consistent mentorship looks like. This is what happens when belief is reinforced week after week. Champions are not built loudly or overnight—they are built quietly, steadily, and with intention.

And it all begins at the lunch table.



From Pinecones to Purpose: 4-H Dream Center Program Cultivates Learning and Leadership

Brooksville, FL

Contributor: Terrance Cole

Each Wednesday after school, 52 elementary students participate in hands-on agricultural learning through the 4-H Dream Center after-school enrichment program. Designed to introduce youth to agriculture beyond the classroom, the program emphasizes experiential learning, environmental stewardship, and life skills development.

This season, students engaged in a project using longleaf pinecones harvested from the FAMU Brooksville Agricultural and Environmental Research Station. The pinecones were transformed into pinecone bird feeders and holiday ornaments, combining creativity with lessons in agriculture and conservation. Through this activity, students learned about sustainable forest management, wildlife care, and the importance of using natural resources responsibly.

The project also reinforced core 4-H principles such as patience, responsibility, and teamwork, demonstrating how simple materials from nature can be used with purpose and intention.

Located on historic agricultural land, the FAMU Brooksville campus has long served as a hub for agricultural research, education, and community engagement. Through the Dream Center program, that legacy continues as youth gain early exposure to agriculture, environmental science, and leadership opportunities.

The 4-H Dream Center program currently serves youth across five counties—Pasco, Hillsborough, Hernando, Sumter, and Polk—providing meaningful enrichment opportunities, particularly in urban and underserved communities. For many participants, the program offers their first introduction to where food comes from, agricultural career pathways, and positive mentorship.

Through hands-on learning and consistent engagement, the 4-H Dream Center program continues to plant the seeds for future growth—both in agriculture and in the lives of the youth it serves.



Beef Cattle Ag Judging Practice with the Life, Liberty, and Livestock 4-H Club

Monticello, FL

Contributor: Emily Nolen



Photos: Youth with class 2 of judged cattle.; Youth in the field with the cattle being judged.

January 29, 2026– Members of the Life, Liberty, and Livestock 4-H Club's Ag Judging Team gathered at Hoffner Cattle Company to practice evaluating beef cattle in preparation for the upcoming North Florida Livestock Show and Sale. The youth judged three classes of cattle, including two heifer classes and one steer class, assessing each animal for body conformation, movement, and either breeding potential or market suitability.

Participating in live cattle classes allows 4-H members to gain hands-on experience that closely mirrors the competitions they will encounter, while also providing practical knowledge of beef cattle and show cattle production. UF/IFAS Agriculture Agent Ben Hoffner guided the youth through the evaluation process, highlighting key differences in cattle quality and offering tips for improving their judging skills. Participants also discussed their reasoning for class placements, including factors that might lower an animal's ranking.

The club will convene next week for its monthly livestock meeting, where members will explore citrus production and farm machinery.



4-H Day at the Capitol

Contributor: Amelia Davis

January 28, 2026-4-H members from across Florida converged on the Florida State Capitol in Tallahassee for 4-H Day at the Capitol, an annual event that highlights civic engagement and provides youth with firsthand experience in state government. The program offers participants a unique opportunity to meet with elected officials, learn about the legislative process, and advocate for 4-H and its impact in communities across the state.

Representatives from the FAMU Cooperative Extension and UF/IFAS Extension were present with interactive stations and games, helping attendees of all ages explore agricultural topics and learn through fun, hands-on activities that reflect 4-H's "learn by doing" philosophy. Youth also shared their personal 4-H stories with legislators to illustrate how the program has shaped their leadership, communication, and citizenship skills.

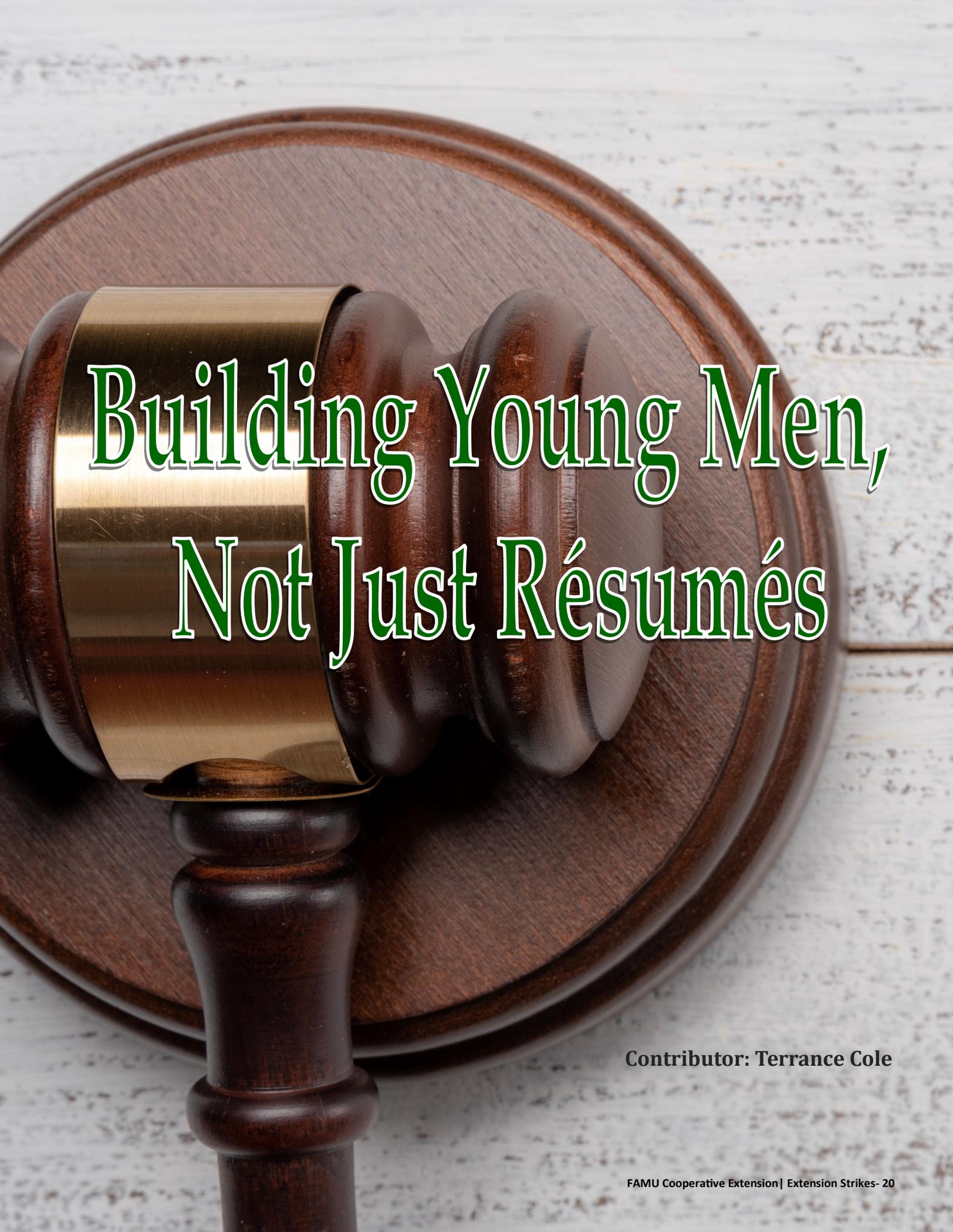
4-H Day at the Capitol is designed to deepen young people's understanding of government and encourage responsible civic participation while fostering connections among 4-H members from every corner of the state.



Attendees at the 4H Day at the capital and the FAMU Extension's Youth, Family and Community (YFC) Team. (Photos: Jalen Williams/FAMU Extension)

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Building Young Men, Not Just Résumés

Contributor: Terrance Cole

How FAMU 4-H Is Supporting Career Readiness and Discipline in Justice-Involved Settings

Every Sunday, Change Happens Behind the Walls.

Every Sunday, within a secure justice-involved youth setting, FAMU 4-H creates space for something rare: structured hope. In an environment designed for accountability and safety, this Extension-led career readiness mentoring initiative focuses on preparation, personal responsibility, and transformation.

From 1:00–2:30 PM, the program serves young adults ages 18–21 at a critical crossroads between justice involvement and adulthood. From 2:45–4:45 PM, mentoring continues with youth ages 14–17, many of whom encounter the justice system earlier than they should. While the age groups differ, the mission remains the same: interrupt cycles and support pathways toward productive futures.

Why Career Readiness Begins With the Mind

National workforce data consistently show that more than 70% of employers cite gaps in soft skills—such as emotional regulation, accountability, punctuality, and decision-making—as the primary reason young workers struggle to retain employment. These challenges, rather than technical ability, are often the leading causes of job loss.

In response, this FAMU 4-H program integrates evidence-based, cognitive behavioral-informed life skills education to help participants better understand how thoughts influence emotions and how emotions influence actions. Many justice-involved youth operate in survival mode, reacting rather than responding. Through structured activities and guided reflection, participants learn to slow down, recognize patterns in their thinking, challenge unhelpful thoughts, and practice healthier responses.

This program does not provide clinical therapy. Instead, it uses educational strategies aligned with Positive Youth Development to build self-awareness, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making.

Discipline Is the Skill That Changes Everything

Before résumés are written or careers explored, discipline is established. Participants learn that discipline is not punishment—it is freedom. Showing up on time, listening before reacting, following structure, and completing tasks are practiced weekly.

Research shows that justice-involved youth who develop self-discipline and cognitive control are

significantly less likely to reoffend and more likely to maintain employment. In this program, discipline becomes the bridge between justice involvement and independence.

Why an Agricultural Land-Grant Institution Teaches Discipline This Way

FAMU 4-H is traditionally recognized for excellence in agriculture—but agriculture, at its core, is discipline. You plant intentionally. You tend consistently. You wait patiently. You harvest responsibly.

Even within a secure facility, without fields or tools, these principles still apply. Growth does not happen overnight. Neglect has consequences. Consistency produces results. These agricultural truths become life lessons—used to teach young men how to manage their emotions, make thoughtful choices, and prepare for future careers.

This program may not look like traditional agriculture, but it lives by agricultural law: what you cultivate daily determines what you reap tomorrow.

Serving an Overlooked and High-Risk Population

Justice-involved youth and young adults ages 14–21 represent one of the most underserved populations in education and workforce development. Many carry trauma, academic gaps, and fractured trust in authority. FAMU 4-H meets them where they are—offering structure instead of shame and accountability instead of abandonment.

Through Extension partnerships, mentoring, and life skills education, participants are supported in developing resilience, confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Hopeful Outcomes That Extend Beyond Release

Participants leave the program with stronger emotional awareness, improved decision-making skills, increased confidence, and a new internal narrative. They begin to see themselves not as statistics or system-involved youth, but as young men capable of discipline, growth, and contribution.

This is how recidivism is reduced—not only through policy, but through preparation. Not only through consequences, but through character.

FAMU 4-H Is Not Just Teaching Career Skills—We're Supporting Futures, One Sunday at a Time

Terrance Cole is the 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent at the FAMU BAERS location in Hernando County, Florida.





Finding Balance: Why I Practice Low Impact Sustainable Agriculture (LISA)

Contributor: Trevor Hylton

The debate over organic versus conventional agriculture seems like it will never end. Both systems offer real benefits, and both come with challenges, which means we'll likely continue discussing them for years to come. Media coverage tends to highlight the environmental concerns surrounding modern agriculture—pesticides, water use, soil degradation—and the rising incidence of foodborne illnesses. Yet it's also true that modern agriculture has dramatically improved productivity and efficiency around the world.

Over the past 50 years, global food production has soared. According to the World Bank, 70–90% of these increases came from advancements in conventional agriculture, not from expanding the amount of land under cultivation. This productivity has helped make food abundant and relatively inexpensive for U.S. consumers. But these benefits can come with environmental costs we cannot ignore.

Extension Work: Staying Grounded in Research

As an Extension Agent, my job is to provide research-based, unbiased information grounded in the recommendations of UF and FAMU Extension. Personal preferences don't play a role when I'm advising growers, homeowners, or community members. Yes, we all have our own biases, but my goal is always to remain objective—unless someone specifically asks what I do in my own garden at home.

And what I do at home is something a little different.

My Gardening Approach: LISA

My personal gardening style falls somewhere between organic and conventional. I follow what I call Low Impact Sustainable Agriculture (LISA), a balanced, practical system that uses the best tools from both worlds while minimizing harm to the environment.

I'm not opposed to using conventional pesticides. However, I use them sparingly and only when:

1. Organic options fail, or
2. No organic products are available, and Cultural controls—like crop rotation, sanitation, or resistant varieties—are inadequate.

If a pesticide is necessary, I always follow label instructions, knowing that over 400 pests and more than 70 fungal pathogens have developed resistance to one or more pesticides. That reality alone is reason to use all products—organic or conventional—with care.

And we can't forget the pressure pesticides place on pollinators and other beneficial species. Natural does not always mean safe, and many organic pesticides can be harmful if misused. Thoughtfulness is essential.



Water Wisdom: Using Only What's Needed

Water scarcity around the world is increasingly tied to overuse of surface and groundwater resources. With that in mind, I use micro-irrigation in both my vegetable and ornamental gardens. Delivering water directly to the root zone:

- Reduces water waste
- Lowers disease risk

Helps keep my utility bill in check

My lawn gets similar treatment—watering only when the grass blades curl from drought stress, and even then, focusing on the “hot spots” first.

Composting: Returning to the Land

My gardening philosophy is simple:

“Anything that comes from the land should return to the land.”

That’s why I maintain a large compost pile made up of clippings, dead leaves, and even larger branches. I’ll admit, I don’t turn the pile because of its size—so decomposition is slow. But it’s the easiest method for me, and eventually everything breaks down and returns to enrich my soil.

A Lesson from the Garden

If gardening has taught me anything, it’s this:

Nature is not a competitor to conquer, but a partner to cherish.

Through LISA, I’m able to grow healthy, productive gardens without stripping the soil, stressing water resources, or harming the ecosystem. The choices I make today ensure that my grandson—and future generations—can enjoy the same natural resources I do.

And that’s the true goal of sustainable agriculture.

Trevor Hylton is the FAMU Extension Urban Ag. Agent, in Leon County, FL

The Red-Cockaded Woodpecker: Conservation and Management in the Red Hills

Contributor: Linda Sapp

The Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) is an endangered species whose survival depends heavily on the preservation and proper management of mature longleaf pine ecosystems. Unlike other woodpeckers, the RCW creates its cavities in living pine trees—particularly older longleaf pines—a process that can take years. Habitat loss, changes in forest management practices, and the decline of longleaf pine forests have all contributed to its endangered status. Today, conservation efforts focus on research, translocation, and the creation of artificial cavities to help stabilize and grow RCW populations.

The Red Hills region of Florida and Georgia is one of the most important strongholds for this species. Tall Timbers, located in Florida, plays a critical role in Red-Cockaded Woodpecker conservation and management. Since 2006, Tall Timbers has been actively involved in RCW reintroduction efforts, demonstrating steady population growth and improved habitat quality. By managing mature longleaf pine forests and maintaining the open, fire-dependent structure these birds require, Tall Timbers provides ideal conditions for RCWs to establish territories and thrive.

A major focus of this work is cavity management. RCWs depend on cavities for nesting and roosting, and these cavities are also used by many other wildlife species, making RCWs a keystone species in the longleaf pine ecosystem. Tall Timbers, often in partnership with the Stoddard Bird Lab, uses artificial cavity inserts and closely monitors natural cavities. Their research also examines foraging behavior and habitat use, with the long-term goal of increasing not only the number of birds, but also the number of active territories across the Red Hills region.

The Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Conservation and Management Workshop provided participants with hands-on experience and a deeper understanding of the science and field practices behind RCW recovery. The workshop began with a wagon tour of Tall Timbers, offering an introduction to RCW biology, habitat requirements, and management strategies. Participants learned about the importance of longleaf pine ecosystems and how prescribed fire and forest

thinning help maintain suitable conditions.

One of the most engaging components involved practicing cavity noosing and learning how to use mobile apps for navigation and data collection. A capture demonstration showed how RCWs are safely handled for research and monitoring. Participants were then divided into small groups and dropped off at various locations on the property to put their new skills into action. We learned how to identify active cavity trees, navigate using mapping apps, complete data forms, and place metal bands on trees to mark cavity locations.

Additional training included using spotting scopes for resight surveys and reviewing survey protocols such as the 123 survey method. Participants also received an overview of chainsaw and weed whacker safety and usage, along with explanations of which areas required raking to reduce vegetation around cavity trees. In small groups, we practiced tree raking—an important task that helps protect cavity trees from predators and fire damage.

The workshop also included ladder training, allowing participants to better understand how researchers access cavities for monitoring and maintenance. One of the highlights was observing RCWs roosting at an old-growth site, a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving mature longleaf pine habitats. Additionally, participants witnessed the installation of an artificial cavity in a longleaf pine, demonstrating one of the most effective tools used to expand nesting opportunities and support population growth.

Overall, the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Conservation and Management Workshop successfully combined education, research, and hands-on conservation practices. It highlighted the vital work being done by Tall Timbers and its partners to protect and restore this endangered species. Through habitat management, scientific research, and community engagement, efforts in the Red Hills region continue to strengthen the future of the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and the longleaf pine ecosystem it depends on.

Special thanks to Rob Meyer and Kate Richardson for a job well done.



Photos: Students attending the class, learning the various stages of tree preservation and management.

Photos courtesy of Linda Sapp

EFNEP Program Assistants Participate in Two-Day Professional Development Training

Contributors: Ciara Holloman, Teron Speer and
Dreamal Worthen, Ph.D.

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Program Assistants and Extension Agents from across the region came together at Florida A&M University, January 7–8, 2026, for a dynamic two-day hybrid training focused on strengthening survey administration, EFNEP curriculum use, and data quality. The daily sessions reinforced the critical role Program Assistants play in delivering high-quality EFNEP education and evaluation.

Day one opened with a welcome and program overview led by Vonda H. Richardson, Director of FAMU Cooperative Extension Program, and Dreamal Worthen

Ph. D., Youth, Family and Community (YFC) Program Leader, highlighting EFNEP goals, reporting requirements, and the importance of accurate data collection. Jane Mumma, Ph.D., guided participants through EFNEP survey tools, including adult entry and exit surveys, emphasizing how lessons align with program indicators. Hands-on sessions followed, where Program Assistants practiced survey administration techniques such as reading questions verbatim, managing low-literacy situations, and avoiding bias through role-play scenarios. The day concluded with an engaging discussion on ethics and confidentiality developed by FAMU Extension Agent, Teron Speer, MPH, underscoring informed consent, participant privacy, and secure data handling.

Day two began with a review of key takeaways before transitioning into a WebNEERS overview led by EFNEP Program Coordinator, Ciara Holloman, MPH, and a quality assurance and field logistics panel facilitated by EFNEP Program Assistant, Eunice Stevenson. Topics included attendance tracking, program fidelity, materials management, and effective communication with supervisors. The training wrapped up with Dr. Mumma outlining next steps, competency expectations, and a final Q&A, ensuring Program Assistants left confident, prepared, and aligned in delivering EFNEP with integrity and consistency.



Conservation-Focused Planning Guides Gulf Specimen Sign Relocation

Contributor: George Harrison

Panacea, Florida — Gulf Specimen Marine Lab & Aquarium has begun planning efforts to relocate its long-standing roadside sign following recent changes requiring the sign to be moved from its original location.

On January 25, Jack Rudloe and Cypress Rudloe met on site with Sam Hand to tour the Lab's newly purchased property and discuss next steps. The visit focused on evaluating existing trees, site conditions, and opportunities for environmentally responsible landscaping.

Sam Hand, Director of Industry Certification Training and Recidivism Reduction Training Programs with FAMU Cooperative Extension, provided guidance on conservation-minded land use and tree assessment to help ensure the project aligns with best practices in environmental stewardship.

“As an aquarium rooted in conservation and education, it's important that this process is handled thoughtfully,” said Cypress Rudloe, Executive Director of Gulf Specimen Marine Lab. “We want to protect the natural landscape while remaining visible and accessible to the communities we serve.”

The sign relocation represents an opportunity for Gulf Specimen Marine Lab to balance environmental protection with visibility and public access, demonstrating how conservation values can guide development decisions.

Article originally written and photos courtesy of Gulf Specimen Marine Lab & Aquarium.



Cultivating Community Through

Gardening

Contributor: Angel Forde, Ph.D.

Gardening is a practice that has been cherished for over a century in the United States, proving just as essential today as it was in yesteryears. Far more than just planting, gardening is defined as growing plants for their vegetables, fruits, flowers, herbs, and appearance within a designated space. It is a unique blend of natural and unnatural, where humans arrange nature into rows or swaths, define boundaries, and select which plants coexist.

Gardens serve a multitude of purposes, from creating aesthetically pleasing spaces to providing medicines, cosmetics, dyes, foods, and even wildlife habitats. They also offer therapeutic, health, educational, cultural, philosophical, environmental, and religious benefits. A garden can be a rejuvenating retreat, a place of wonder, a playground, an art canvas, or a learning classroom.

An estimated 20 to 30 percent of the global urban population engages in some form of urban gardening and agriculture. These gardens manifest in various forms, from rooftop herb and vegetable havens to charming front-yard displays. Community gardens, in particular, are multifaceted, serving as laboratories, food baskets, cultural refuges, business incubators, and mystical ministries. The USDA Cooperative Extension recognized the importance of urban gardens, inaugurating an Urban Garden Program in 1976. This program encouraged nonprofit organizations (such as FAMU Extension) to collaborate with communities, offering external expertise to complement local leadership and develop gardens to enhance their connectivity. The program expanded

until 1985, providing federal assistance for education in large cities across different states through 4-H-type projects

Community Building Through Gardening Community gardens are more than just spaces for growing fresh produce; they are vibrant hubs of camaraderie. Garden leaders understand that these spaces not only foster a sense of community but also build the community's capacity to meet its own needs and achieve its goals. Gardeners often report that community gardens facilitate the construction of new identities, allowing for the re-establishment of cultural practices in new environments and the adoption of new practices. Exposure to the earth through gardening has been shown to reduce stress and increase a sense of wellness and belonging, solidifying community gardens as symbols of empowerment and positive change.

Involving younger generations in community gardening can equip them with skills to build sustainable communities for the future. Studies indicate that community gardeners and their children generally eat healthier than their non-gardening counterparts. Moreover, these initiatives offer opportunities for inter-generational and cross-cultural connections.

Ecological and Social Benefits of Urban Gardens Urban gardens contribute significantly to ecological well-being. They can help cool down cities, which often become "heat islands" due to the concrete buildings. Studies have shown that strategically placed urban gardens can lower local temperatures by several degrees, greatly enhancing comfort and public health during severe heat waves.

Additionally, gardens help reduce air and noise pollution, mitigate flooding, and support biodiversity by offering habitats for various wildlife. Gardens such as pollinator gardens help by ensuring the population of bees remains active and provides the resources we need. Furthermore, the benefits of a garden extend to numerous social aspects: The social interactions and the cultivation of relationships include, but are not limited to

- Health benefits
- Food source and food security
- Community organizing, empowerment, and mobilization
- Fresh air and sunshine
- Enjoyment
- Mental therapy
- Economic savings

Researchers have identified several characteristics of community gardening that contribute to community building, including social connections, reciprocity, mutual trust, collective decision-making, social norms, civic engagement, and the sense of community, sense of belonging, and sense of place. Through recruitment,

volunteerism, leadership, and neighborhood organization, gardeners demonstrate social cohesion and collective efficacy. Cooperative gardening aligns with sustainable living principles by encouraging participants to reduce waste and energy consumption through shared resources like tools, compost, and water.

Growing food locally also reduces the carbon footprint and promotes a healthier lifestyle. In an increasingly digital world, gardening co-ops provide a tangible way to connect, fostering a sense of togetherness by sharing triumphs, setbacks, and fresh harvests. As Hanna Rion eloquently stated, “The greatest gift of a garden is the restoration of the five senses”. This enduring tradition continues to enrich lives and build stronger communities across the nation.

References

[What is a community garden? – Cultivate Community Gardens](#)
[Cultivating Community, Resilience, and a Sustainable Future Through Urban Gardens | Sustainable America](#)
[Cultivating Community Through Shared Gardens: The Power of Gardening Co-Ops! | Earth](#)



Various types of gardens people can create with minimal experience and fits every budget.

Photos: Courtesy of Amelia Davis/FAMU Research and Extension Center (except raised beds gardens photo)

Economic Impact of Freeze Events on Florida Agriculture



Contributor: Daniel Solis , Ph.D.

Freeze events create severe economic challenges for Florida’s agricultural industry, a sector responsible for billions in annual revenue. During the January–February 2026 cold outbreak, officials warned that plunging temperatures and high winds threatened crops across regions unaccustomed to freezing conditions. Florida’s Agriculture Commissioner sought federal disaster assistance in advance, recognizing the risk to vital winter crops such as tomatoes, bell peppers, citrus, and strawberries—crops that supply much of the eastern United States.

The economic stakes are high: Florida’s fresh fruit and vegetable sector generated \$2.47 billion in gross income in 2022, meaning freeze induced losses immediately disrupt farm revenue and statewide economic activity. As temperatures dipped to 30°F in Orlando and 39°F in Miami, projections indicated the state could face more than \$13 billion in agricultural damages if conditions worsened.

Strawberries illustrate the financial vulnerability of freeze events. In Dover, temperatures fell into the 20s, forcing farmers to work overnight using irrigation and ground covers to save their plants. Ripened berries were expected to be lost, but preserving blossoms—future revenue—was critical.

Because strawberry income is concentrated into a few months, losing even part of the harvest significantly reduces annual earnings.

Other crops suffered costly damage as well. Citrus growers reported widespread blossom destruction, while mango farmers warned that freeze damage could delay fruiting until 2027, eliminating multiple seasons of income. In South Florida, younger papaya and banana plants were entirely destroyed, eliminating future revenue before the crops reached maturity.

Vegetable growers also experienced immediate financial losses. One tomato producer reported losing 20% of his crop overnight, forecasting higher market prices due to reduced supply. Green bean growers faced similar losses despite pre freeze irrigation efforts intended to prevent frost damage.

Overall, freeze events threaten billions of dollars in agricultural value by reducing crop yields, damaging perennial fruit trees, increasing emergency protection costs, and triggering consumer price spikes. As unusual cold extremes become more common, these events pose an escalating economic risk to Florida’s agricultural stability.



Hands Off The Pruners: The Grapevine is Resting!

Contributor: Frank Humphries



Muscadines are a type of grape native to the southeastern United States, known for their unique flavor, sweet berries, and strong adaptation to the region's hot, humid climate. They are widely enjoyed fresh and are also used for juice, jelly, and wine which make them excellent crops for commercial or hobbyist growers.

As temperatures drop and daylight fades, muscadine vines across North Florida enter their winter rest period called dormancy. Dormancy is essential for protecting next year's crop and understanding what this process does for the vine can make all the difference when spring arrives. The process is same as what happens to deciduous trees which drop their leaves over winter time.

Why This Matters in North Florida

Dormancy allows grapevines to harden off, conserve energy, and protect sensitive tissues from cold injury. Even though the vines appear quiet, they are preparing for next season's growth. Seeing this phenomenon may raise concern for the growers but rest assured this is a natural process this time of the year.

What growers do during this period, especially in terms of pruning timing, directly affects bud survival and next year's fruitfulness. Figure 1 shows a muscadine vineyard entering early winter dormancy as yellowing leaves drop and canes harden.

North Florida consistently receives more frequent and significant freezing temperatures than Central or South Florida, which means early-pruned vines are at a higher risk of cold damage during unpredictable winter warm-ups and frost events.

How Grapevines Grow

Muscadine vines carry next year's shoots and fruit clusters inside tiny compound buds located on one-year-old wood, which is last season's growth. These buds formed during the previous growing season, and winter dormancy helps safeguard them until spring. Figure 2B shows a one-year-old cane with dormant buds that already contain next year's growth.

When vines experience cooler temperatures, the buds enter a deeper state of rest and remain protected until conditions warm. Pruning too early removes productive one-year-old wood, reduces the number of healthy buds, and can cause buds to swell earlier than they should. This makes them much more vulnerable to a late frost. Understanding where next year's fruit is formed makes choosing the correct pruning window even more important.

Pruning Now – Yes or No?

No. In North Florida, do not prune muscadine vines in early winter. It can be tempting to start pruning early when the vine has begun to go dormant, but this is a common mistake. Wait until mid-February or after the last significant frost. Holding off keeps buds safely dormant during the most unpredictable part of the winter.

If you are ever unsure, remember that it is always better to prune late than early. Vines that are pruned later sometimes show more sap bleeding, but this does not harm the plant. Early pruning, however, can make the tender, young buds more susceptible to frost damage which will impact the quantity and quality of next year's harvest.

What to Do in November–December?

Early winter is the time to prepare the vineyard without cutting back canes. After harvest, gradually ease off irrigation to help vines harden. Only water enough to prevent severe drought in very sandy soils. Hold all nitrogen fertilizers until spring. This is also the ideal time for sanitation. Remove any mummified berries and obviously diseased canes still hanging on the trellis. These dried, shriveled fruit can carry disease into the next season, as shown in Figure 2C. Cleaning up now helps reduce fungal problems when vines wake up in spring. Trellis repairs also fit well into this season. Tighten wires, replace damaged staples or anchors, and straighten leaning posts while the canopy is thin.

Some older muscadine vines may also show aerial roots along the trunk or cordons, especially in low spots or wetter areas of the vineyard (Figure 2A). These roots often form when the soil stays very moist and low in oxygen. They help the vine absorb oxygen from the air and should be left alone rather than pruned off. If aerial roots are common in a block, it is a sign to pay attention to drainage and soil moisture over time.

Tool care is another important winter task. Sharpen pruners and loppers so they make clean, healthy cuts later. Just as important, sanitize your tools to help prevent spreading diseases from vine to vine. Wipe or dip blades regularly in a 70 percent ethanol solution or a dilute bleach solution up to 50 percent, refreshing the solution as it becomes dirty.

Finally, walk through the vineyard and take note of where pruning will be needed once winter ends. Photograph crowded areas or problem spots now so you can plan for healthier spur positioning in spring.

Dormant Sprays

Where product labels allow, a dormant copper or lime-sulfur spray can help reduce fungi that overwinter on the vines. Always follow the label for safety gear, re-entry intervals, and crop instructions, and avoid spraying ahead of a freeze or rainfall.

Spring Readiness Checklist

When the danger of frost has passed, usually by mid-February or later, it is time to prune. At that point, prune one-year-old canes back to short spurs with 3 to 4 buds each, spacing these spurs a few inches apart to keep the canopy open and healthy. Remove any dead, weak, or diseased wood, and clear away tendrils that may be girdling the cordons. Make sure cordons are supported and secure before spring growth begins.

Key Takeaways

Dormancy is the vine's natural protection system. The buds on one-year-old wood already hold next year's shoots and fruit clusters, so avoiding early pruning helps ensure a productive harvest. Always wait until after the last frost, or mid-February at the earliest, to prune. Early winter is better used for cleanup, trellis adjustments, weed control, tool care, and general vineyard preparation. By giving the vines time to rest undisturbed, you set them up for strong growth and a successful season ahead.



Figure 2. **A.** Aerial roots on this mature muscadine signal wet, low-oxygen soil. They help the vine absorb oxygen from the air and should be left alone, do not prune them; **B.** One-year-old muscadine cane showing dormant compound buds. These buds already contain next season's shoots and fruit clusters. Wait until after the last frost before pruning; **C.** Mummified muscadine berries left over from harvest. Early winter is the ideal time to remove this dried fruit and other debris from the trellis to reduce overwintering fungal inoculum before spring growth begins.

Small Farm Start-up School Launches at FAMU Brooksville with a Focus on Tech Tools for Farmers

Contributor: Cheryl Danley



Beginner Farmers and Rancher Workshop, October 2025.



Beginner Farmers and Rancher Hay Sampling Workshop October 2025.

The Florida Cooperative Small Farm Start-up School (SFSS) is expanding statewide in 2026—and one of its most distinctive sites will be hosted at the FAMU Brooksville Agricultural and Environmental Research Station (BAERS). The nine-week program, now offered in ten locations across Florida, is a collaborative effort between Florida A&M University Cooperative Extension Program and University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, marking a new chapter of cooperation between the state's two land-grant universities.

The Brooksville location is unique: it is the only site where FAMU and UF/IFAS agents are co-teaching and collaborating directly.

A Joint Effort at Brooksville

At BAERS, Cheryl Danley, FAMU Extension Small Farms Agent, will collaborate with J. Stacy Strickland, UF/IFAS Hernando County Agricultural Agent, to deliver programming with a special emphasis on technology tools for small farmers. The Brooksville SFSS builds on prior workshops hosted at BAERS that explored drone technology and the use of artificial intelligence to develop customized tools for individual farming operations. This collaboration is not new. In October 2025, BAERS hosted a Beginning Farmer and Rancher workshop series where Dr. Strickland presented on AI tools to advance farming and ranching, laying the groundwork for the tech-focused approach now embedded in the SFSS curriculum.

Drones, AI, and Farm Readiness

Participants in the Brooksville SFSS will benefit from Hernando County Extension's nationally recognized

expertise in drone technology. Through the UF/IFAS Drone Prep Course, developed by Dr. Strickland and Brittany Hall-Scharf, participants will have the opportunity to prepare for licensure as drone operators. During the in-person Week 6 session in May, the Brooksville site will demonstrate spray drone applications for agricultural chemicals, showcasing real-world technology already being adopted by farmers.

Program Structure and Statewide Reach

The SFSS is designed to help new and beginning farmers develop business plans that meet minimum USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) requirements. Across all ten locations, the program follows a coordinated structure:

- **Week 1 (April 14, 2026):** On-site farm tour and program launch
- **Weeks 2-5 & 7-8:** Weekly remote sessions on Tuesday evenings (6:30-8:30 p.m.)
- **Week 6 (May):** On-site, location-specific programming
- **Week 9 (June):** Final farm tour, field day, or mini-conference
- **While the curriculum is consistent statewide, each site highlights local strengths. At Brooksville, that strength is technology-enabled farming.**

Looking Ahead

The Florida Cooperative Small Farm Start-up School reflects the shared mission of FAMU and UF/IFAS to support Florida's next generation of farmers with practical, research-based education. At BAERS, the collaboration goes a step further—demonstrating how joint programming, emerging technologies, and hands-on learning can prepare small farmers to succeed in a rapidly changing agricultural landscape.

Managing Rootstock Shoots on Citrus

Contributor: Donna Arnold

Spotting Trifoliolate Leaves and Thorns Before They Overtake the Scion

Citrus trees are popular in Florida landscapes for their fragrance, adaptability, and fruit quality. However, homeowners are often surprised when vigorous new shoots appear with unusual traits, such as trifoliolate leaves and large thorns. This usually means the tree is producing growth from the rootstock, not the desired fruiting variety known as the scion. Recognizing and managing this early helps protect tree health and fruit production. (Fig.1)

Why Citrus Trees Are Grafted

Most nursery citrus trees are grafted. The scion (top portion) produces fruit such as oranges, lemons, or limes. The rootstock (bottom portion) is selected for disease resistance, cold tolerance, and soil adaptability. Common Florida rootstocks include trifoliolate orange and hybrids like Swingle citrumelo and Carrizo citrange. These are hardy and vigorous, but their fruit is typically sour and inedible. (Fig 2)

Why Rootstock Shoots Appear

Shoots, often called suckers, may emerge due to:

- Damage from storms, freezes, or lawn equipment
- Stress from drought, disease, or citrus greening (HLB)
- Naturally vigorous rootstock growth

If not removed early, these shoots can overtake the tree and replace the fruiting variety.

How to Recognize Rootstock Growth

Look for:

- Trifoliolate (three-part) leaves
- Very upright, fast growth
- Long, stiff thorns (often 2–4 inches)
- Shoots emerging below the graft union, seen as a bend or swelling on the trunk

If the entire tree shows trifoliolate leaves, the original scion may have died.(Fig.3)

Managing Rootstock Shoots

Remove suckers as soon as they appear:

- Cut shoots flush with the trunk—do not leave stubs
- Check below the graft union regularly
- Avoid trunk damage from mowers or trimmers
- Maintain proper watering and nutrition to support scion growth

When Replacement Is Needed

If all growth comes from rootstock, the tree will no longer produce the intended fruit, and replacement is recommended.

References -HS1329/HS1329: Citrus Nursery Production Guide, Chapter 6: Citrus Rootstock Propagation: Traditional Techniques and Recent Advance



Photos : Donna Arnold



P R E S E N T S



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Upcoming Events

CALENDAR



January 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6 National Bean Day	7	8	9	10
11 National Milk Day	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday - Observed	20	21	22  FAMU 4-H Family Night 6 pm– 8 pm	23	24 National Peanut Butter Day
25	26	27	28 4-H Day at the Capital  STEAM NIGHT Fairview Middle School	29  STEAM NIGHT Montford Middle School	30 Wakulla 4-H Gala 	31

February 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THUIRSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4 Conference: Journal of Coop. Ext. Professional Leadership	5 National Hemp Day	6	7
8	9	10	11	12  STEAM NIGHT Fort Braden	13	14  Happy Valentines Day
15 Trails & Nature Walking Club meets at Tom Brown Park 3 pm	16	17	18	19 FAMU DRS FFA Ag Expo 	20	21 WPB Walking Club meets at Clear Lake Trail 8:30 AM African-American History Festival Apalachicola, Florida
22 African-American History Festival Apalachicola, Florida	23	24	25	26 FAMU 4-H Family Night 	27	28 FAMU Harambee Festival Will Packer Amphitheater
<h1>Black History Month</h1>						

March 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15 Trails & Nature Walking Club meets at Tom Brown Park 3 pm	<i>Spring Break</i>					
22	23	24	25 	26 	27 	28 
IGNITE BY 4-H Washington, DC						
29 	30	31				



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