Employers noted the value a recent University of Florida training event provides to their agricultural operations as their employees learned worker protection standards to prevent injuries and food contamination.

About 300 agricultural workers representing Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, and Okeechobee counties enrolled in the University of Florida Citrus Safety Training & Tractor Rodeo 14th Annual event held Wednesday, Jan. 18, at the St. Lucie County Fairgrounds.

Event sponsors were ICL Specialty Fertilizers and Everglades Farm Equipment Co. Taking the “Indian River Cup Trophy,” for the third consecutive year was IMG Citrus Co.

Eight of the prominent citrus production company’s employees participated as a team in Pest and Disease ID, and Tractor Rodeo competition events. The trophy the team won bragging rights to will “travel” with the IMG Citrus Co. and return for 2018 events.

Leading this year’s training seminar were seven UF extension agents, along with UF’s Indian River Research and Education Center recently appointed assistant professor of Citrus Horticulture, Dr. Rhuanito “Johnny” Soranz Ferrarezi.

Dr. Rhuanito “Johnny” Soranz Ferrarezi and ICL Specialty Fertilizers, event sponsor representative Grant Cloughley, a UF/IRREC graduate, discuss the Tractor Rodeo
INDUSTRY TARGETED TRAINING

The agricultural workers, most who work citrus groves, attended seminars during which the university experts imparted the latest safety tips they could use during their daily work tasks. Topics covered were mixing and loading; fertilizer and pesticide best management practices; spill control and cleanup; worker protection standards, hidden dangers in the field; ladder and tractor safety; mosquito-borne diseases; and, pest and disease identification.

The training saves agricultural companies’ money because the workers learn how to prevent accidents, food contamination, and, how to respond quickly to an actual accident event, said Christine Kelly-Begazo, UF/IFAS Indian River County Extension Service Director.

BERNARD EGAN CO. REPRESENTATIVE

“I am a food safety administer so this goes right in line with what I am training our employees to do,” said Richard Gauss, who represented Bernard Egan Co. at the event.

“This type of training is invaluable to our industry and is a requirement by most of the third party audits that we do.”

NEW MODULES

Kelly-Begazo said that new training modules incorporated this year provided fresh material to protect the workers’ personal safety. The updated topics were about dangerous animals found in groves, mosquito-borne disease protection, and, a special segment on feral hogs.
The training brings the laborers together for a day when they can be reminded how to protect themselves and their employer’s business.”

“The workers handle chemicals and heavy machinery and this training will prevent accidents from occurring.”

TRAINING IS PREVENTION

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“The workers handle chemicals and heavy machinery and this training will prevent accidents from occurring.”

PESTICIDES HANDLING TRAINING

Presenting training for handling pesticides was Nickie Munroe, UF/IFAS Indian River County Horticulture Extension Agent.

Munroe’s training modules involved spill control and cleanup after the chemicals are used.

“We remind them that wearing the goggles will protect their eye sight and that reading chemical labels is a must.”

Munroe said there are requisite steps to mix, load, apply, and cleanup pesticides. The steps must take place in a sequential order to prevent spills.
NEW AND REFINED SKILLS

While many of the event’s attendees were familiar with the safety topics, some said they learned new information.

Steve Washington, who works for Hamilton Agriculture Services, said he feels more confident in his ability to handle chemicals, as a result of the training.

“I now understand how to dispose chemicals in containers,” said Washington.

“By using a triple rinse, we don’t put chemicals into the environment that will contaminate the soil.”

Washington added that the vehicle safety segment was also valuable. He said he understands now not to drive too near to a canal in the groves.

MOVE OVER LAW

Another matter drivers must know when driving on a highway is to move to another lane when passing a vehicle that has been pulled over by a member of the police force. And, if moving to another lane is not possible, the law is that a passing driver must decrease driving speed by 20 miles per hour.

BILINGUAL TRAINING SESSIONS

Each training session was present in both English and Spanish languages. Assisting Kelly-Begazo in fluent Spanish were Darren Cole, a 4-H Extension Agent for the Indian River County Extension Service; and Regional Specialized Extension Agent Cesar Asuaje, with the UF/IFAS Palm Beach County Extension Service. Asuaje appeared in a well-produced video, in which he explained ladder safety.
St. Lucie Cooperative Extension Service Agent Natural Resources Extension Agent Ken Gioeli presented, “Hidden Dangers in the Field,” covering harmless snakes, venomous snakes, feral hogs, rats and coyotes. Wearing Kevlar boots in the field is important, he said.

FERAL HOGS ISSUE

Several participants said Gioeli’s presentation was valuable because provided a solution for ranchers to handle the invasive feral hog problem. The hogs destroy crops and are aggressive, said Gioeli.

“Feral hogs will stand their ground so don’t try to get close to them,” said Gioeli. “The way to deal with the hogs is not with single box traps or by hunting them because they change their behavior.”

A more effective method to control the hogs is to construct a corral fence with spring-loaded doors in a remote area of a ranchland or grove production area. Gioeli said to bait the corral with a supply of corn in the center and then allow time for the hogs to attract a
larger group of hogs, called a “sounder” into the corral. After a large sounder collects inside the corral, Gioeli said the most efficient method to control the hogs is to shoot them inside the corral, as gaining transport license is costly and requires time. He recommended ranchers and grove owners use the meat to prepare a barbecue.

Following the event’s morning sessions was a barbecue pork luncheon provided by Carter’s Grocery, a family-owned country grocery store and casual restaurant popular with St. Lucie County’s agricultural workers.

PEST AND DISEASE ID

During the lunch, about 25 workers worked through a stand of about 15 young citrus trees in pots, positioned in two long rows. Using materials to assist in the identification of citrus diseases, competitors worked through a checklist to identify citrus greening, diaprepes root weevil, canker and other citrus problems. The activity was led by Dr. Garima Kakkar and Jamie Burrow.

Kakkar recently joined UF/IFAS as the multicounty extension agent II-fruit crops extension agent. She serves the Indian River region and her office is located at the UF/IFAS St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension in Fort Pierce. Burrow is coordinator of canker and greening, Extension Education, based at the UF/IFAS Citrus Research and Education Center, Lake Alfred.
The Pest and Disease ID program

TRACTOR RODEO

After the lunch, Ward Gunter, representing with event sponsor ICL Specialty Fertilizers, led a rousing Tractor Rodeo inside the spacious fairgrounds Adams Auditorium.

Gunter trained participating drivers to operate a state-of-the-art 5075E John Deere Tractor, provided for the rodeo by Everglades Farm Equipment of Fort Pierce. The objective was to operate the tractor safely through an obstacle course, and try not to tap any of the track boundary stakes. Drivers lost a large amount of points for not wearing a seat belt or tapping boundaries.

Tractor Rodeo 3-year champion Juan Pablo Zamora said the key to winning the driving competition is to “drive every day.”

“I have driven tractors since 1999, and you have to stay in practice.”
A special thank you is due to event sponsors: 
ICL Specialty Fertilizers and Everglades Farm Equipment Co.

Dr. Ferrarezi, Dr. Kakkar, Citrus ID and Disease competition third place winner Peter McClure, and Jamie Burrow

WINNING EMPLOYERS AND PARTICIPANTS

While Tractor Rodeo and Citrus Disease ID competition winners took away prizes and a sense of accomplishment, the production company’s managers said the event helped everyone involved to be winners in the region’s agricultural industry.

Barbara Culbertson, Global Gap/ Safety and Compliance Manager for Premier Citrus, said the company relies on the annual event for employee training. Culbertson said that every year, new worker protection standards made and the company’s workers must learn the standards accurately, “for overall safety and to meet regulatory rulings.”

“The training is helpful for our crew. It refreshes their memory so they wear proper gear and pay attention to what they are doing,” said Lance Luther, grove manager for IMG Citrus. “This protects the company from liability.”

Individual place winners for the Citrus ID and Disease competition were:

First Place: Matt Adair
- First Place: Matt Adair
- Second Place: Pat Hall
- Third Place: Peter McClure, Evans Properties

Individual place winners for the Tractor Rodeo were:

- First Place: Juan Pablo Zamora, IMG Citrus Inc.
- Second Place: Noel Juarez, Sexton Groves Service
- Third Place: Ruben Hernandez, Sexton Groves Service
- Honorable Mention: Shameka Finkley-Hines

ICL Specialty Fertilizers representative Ward Gunter presented gift cards and back packs stocked with work-appropriate gifts to each of the place award winners.