



From left to right are: Jeff Ellis, Grove Manager for IMG Citrus Inc.; First Place Tractor Rodeo Winner: Kervis Martinez; Second Place, Salvador Arias, with IMG Citrus, Inc. ; Fourth Place: Fernando Leon; Fifth Place: Alton Kelly, Hamilton Agricultural Services; and Third Place: Daniel Vaca, Premier Citrus.

TOP: "The Indian River Cup" trophy

While food safety for handling fresh fruit covered new material for citrus and vegetable growers who attended a University of Florida training event, organizers said the workers were already utilizing worker safety techniques that they had learned during prior Farmworker Safety Day events.

About 325 agricultural workers representing Indian River, DeSoto, St. Lucie, Martin and Okeechobee counties participated in the 13th Annual University of Florida Citrus Safety

Training & Tractor Rodeo held Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2016, at the St. Lucie County Fairgrounds.

Event sponsors were Everiss and Everglades Farm Equipment Co. The "Indian River Cup Trophy," was presented to the team who accomplished the best cumulative scores for the Tractor Rodeo. The traveling trophy was first presented to the company with the winning team in 2003 and has been awarded on an annual basis each year, for the last 13 years.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Cesar Asuaje, Darren Cole and Christine Kelly Begazo present Worker Safety Protection Standards to grover workers

The trophy entitles the winning team “bragging rights” for a year following each event.

SAFETY TOPICS COVERED

Six UF/IFAS Extension agents and two UF/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center professors, along with officials representing Florida Highway Patrol and the St. Lucie County Fire District, made presentations during the day event. Seven safety topics were covered: first aid; road, ladder, tractor, pesticide and food safety; and, personal hygiene.

“The audience was engaged and knowledgeable about worker protection standards,” said Christine Kelly-Begazo, Director of the UF/IFAS Indian River County Extension.

During the event she led the personal hygiene modules and discussed its impact of food safety.

“When we asked audience members about Worker Protection Standards (WPS) specific topics they would respond with the correct answers,” said Kelly-Begazo.

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Kelly-Begazo said that the concepts taught by herself and the other colleagues of the UF/IFAS Indian River Good Agricultural Practices Training Group are now very well known with industry personnel. She also explained that many of the current participants had recently completed similar course instruction and that day’s event was for reinforcing safety topics.

MODULES FULLY IN SPANISH

Assisting Kelly-Begazo in fluent Spanish were Darren Cole, a recently appointed 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’s work is with farm labor education, and pesticide and farm safety.

Fort Pierce resident and grove worker, Rueben Urbina, said he had learned the value of frequent handwashing at previous training and that this event reinforced the importance of that concept.

“Each time you do something: eat, harvest fruit, pack fruit, visit the restroom, or grab chemicals—you have to wash your hands. It’s important to protect the fruit and to protect yourself and others.”



Cesar Asuaje presents worker safety standards in Spanish

CLEAN SURFACES/ FOOD SAFETY

“Each time you do something: eat, harvest fruit, pack fruit, visit the restroom, or grab chemicals—you have to wash your hands,” said Urbina. “It’s important to protect the fruit and to protect yourself and others.”

Washing hands is an important practice in every industry because it helps prevent the spread of germs and disease.

Dr. Mark Ritenour, professor of postharvest science, said washing surfaces where food is handled is equally important.

Throughout Dr. Ritenour’s lecture he showed projected slides of work surfaces in citrus and vegetable packing houses. The images showed stainless steel tables typical to sorting and waxing processes for fresh fruit; he used a pointer to show creases in the metal that are only visible with high magnification.

“Polished stainless steel can have grooves that are so small that water cannot penetrate,” said Dr. Ritenour.

“It’s important to get sanitizers across all of the grooves in stainless steel surfaces.”

Dr. Mark Ritenour explains food safety as it pertains to handling fresh fruit and packing houses



Food Quality vs. Food Safety

- Food Quality – Appearance
Internal (i.e., size, taste, price, ripeness, etc.)
- External (damages, diseases & moldiness)
if not perfect, can obtain size and look at a lower price.
- Food Safety – Fairly recognizable. All or nothing!
Everything is assumed to be a product best to safe to consume.
- Good Sanitation practices improve BOTH Food Quality and Safety.

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Parker Platts and Dr. Brian Boman at the Food Safety segment

DOCUMENT EQUIPMENT CLEANING AND REPAIRS

Dr. Ritenour said there have not been any recalls for Florida fresh fruit and the way to sustain the industry was to sanitize and clean all equipment and surfaces with frequency, and with documentation.

Some of the particulars in need of documentation are:

- When a piece of equipment is cleaned and with what substance (parts per million of chlorine).
- When a piece of equipment is broken and what repairs were made when.

Because packinghouses are audited, the auditors need to see appropriate documentation for when a packinghouse was sanitized, or, an auditor may not believe the work was completed, said Ritenour.

The training event included a presentation by officials with the Florida Highway Patrol, who reminded attendees

FLORIDA MOVE OVER LAW

about the Florida Move Over Law. The law is, they said, when passing an emergency vehicle, which includes a highway patrolman, is that drivers must move over one lane away from the emergency vehicle.

In a situation when a driver is not able to move over to another lane, the driver must slow down the vehicle by 20 miles per hour less than the posted speed limit when passing the emergency vehicle, officials said.

"The grove workers need to remember texting while driving is illegal," said Parker Platts, an event organizer and Extension Agent I-Fruit Crops, with the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension Service.

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Jeff Ellis and Roger Caraway, grove managers for IMG Citrus Inc.

FIRST AID TRAINING

Platts said officials with the St. Lucie County Fire Department led training sessions about first aid, including first response assistance for victims of heat exhaustion, snake bites, choking and fainting.

WORKERS NEED TO TAKE OFF WHEN ILL

In addition to washing hands and treating accidents, grove workers need to stay home when they are ill, said Jeff Ellis, grove manager for one of the region's largest citrus producers, IMG Citrus, Inc.

IMG, a fresh fruit production company, operates groves in Indian River, St. Lucie counties and in Arcadia, with about 1,500 acres in production along the "River District."

"We want our workers to stay home when they are sick so they won't compromise our fresh fruit."

"So many of our workers were not able to attend today's training because they have the flu and they understand what it can do to fresh fruit product—so they stayed home."

"We want our workers to stay home when they are sick so they won't compromise our fresh fruit," said Ellis.

"So many of our workers were not able to attend today's training because they have the flu and they understand what it can do to fresh fruit product—so they stayed home" he said.

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

Mark Wilson, who has worked the Indian River District's citrus groves for 42 years, said he learned how to sanitize fruit at the event. Wilson is currently employed with Hamilton Agricultural Services, a grove maintenance service provider.



Participants lined up for a hot barbecue lunch catered by Carters Grocery

"I learned pathogens can survive on fruit and the fruit needs to be sanitized better than you would think," said Wilson.

BARBECUE LUNCHEON

The event's morning sessions were following by a barbecue luncheon provided by Carter's Grocery, a family-owned country grocery store and casual restaurant popular with St. Lucie County's agricultural workers.

During the luncheon, the Tractor Rodeo Master of Ceremony, Cesar Asuaje, recruited participants for the lively competition event. Representing Everiss, an event sponsor, was Ward Gunter, who provided training to the drivers to operate a state-of-the-art 5065E John Deere Tractor that was provided for the event by Everglades Farm Equipment of Fort Pierce.

"I learned pathogens can survive on fruit and the fruit needs to be sanitized better than you would think."



Shamika Finkley-Hines, IRREC Agricultural Assistant, handles the tractor during the rodeo. The 5065E John Deere tractor was provided by event sponsor Everglades Farm Equipment in Fort Pierce

TRACTOR RODEO

"It's fun!" said UF/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center Agricultural Assistant Shamika Finkley-Hines.

Though Finkley-Hines did not win the competition, she said she learned how to operate the new model tractor, which will help her with her job duties. She said it was necessary to move the steering column to neutral to change gears and to drive the tractor in reverse.

Finkley-Hines was the sole female participant of 16 to compete in the Tractor Rodeo. She assisted the organizers to reposition stakes that were knocked down when drivers tapped the boundaries of the track with the tractor. The track ran the entire length of the spacious Adams Ranch Equestrian Arena.

Operating a new tractor is not so easy said Samuel Garcia, who has been employed with IMG Citrus Inc. for seven years. He works groves in Fellsmere.



This year's Tractor Rodeo track was two and a half times as long



Regional Specialized Farm Safety and Agriculture Labor Education Extension Agent Cesar Asuaje led Tractor Rodeo participants

"Part of the work is running the tractor itself, but when you have a sprayer on the back of the tractor it's difficult to maneuver—especially when backing up," said Garcia.

Due to the popularity of the Tractor Rodeo, the length of the track was this year extended. This year's track is two and a half times as long as the year before, said Asuaje.

He used the loud speaker to encourage the contestants during their runs. Because the tractor is a new model, many of the drivers stalled and then realized what Finkley-Hines had learned about the 5065E John Deere's steering operations.

Other drivers knocked down many of the boundary stakes and a few spinned the tractor's enormous industrial tires in the arena's red sand floor.

The competition was about driving the course efficiently, but, Dr. Brian Boman, UF/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center Professor of Agricultural Engineering, said the exercise was more about safety.

SAFE AND EFFICIENT TRACTOR OPERATION

"Drivers need to take their time and use the seat belt at the start and after the stop and re-board task of the relay," said Dr. Boman. "One contestant lost 120 points for not wearing a seatbelt."

In keeping the drivers' scores, Dr. Boman said the competitors were not used to driving the model tractor used for the event.

One operator had started the course in the wrong gear and was permitted to begin again.

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"One contestant lost 120 points for not wearing a seatbelt."



Dr. Brian Boman adds participants' scores to determine place and team competition winners

Those who were listed later in the line-up performed better because they were able to see how others performed and engaged from what they had seen, said Boman.

TRACTOR RODEO COMPETITION EVENT WINNERS:

Dr. Boman tallied the scores as the teams awaited the results. And, once again—IMG Citrus Inc. will be recognized with the “Indian River Cup”.

Individual place winners were as follows:

1. First Place: Kervis Martinez, with IMG Citrus Inc.
2. Second Place: Salvador Arias, with IMG Citrus Inc.
3. Third Place: Daniel Vaca, Premier Citrus
4. Fourth Place: Fernando Leon, IMG Citrus Inc.
5. Fifth Place: Alton Kelly, Hamilton Agricultural Services

A special thank you is due to event sponsors:

Everris

Everglades Farm Equipment Co.



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