



From left to right are: Ward Gunter, representing event sponsor Evertis; Juan Pablo Zamora, representing IMG Inc., who placed first in the Tractor Rodeo; Alton Kelly, representing Hamilton Agriculture, and who placed second in the Tractor Rodeo; Dr. Brian Boman, UF/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center Professor of Agricultural Engineering; Parker Platts, one of the event's top organizers and Extension Agent I-Fruit Crops

**F**un competition and updates for the most current agricultural operations safety techniques were highlights during the University of Florida Citrus Safety Training & Tractor Rodeo 12<sup>th</sup> Annual event. Held Jan. 22 at the St. Lucie County Fairgrounds, 440 citrus and landscape workers turned out to attend segments about pesticide, tractor and mower safety, agricultural crime and first aid. Event sponsors were Evertis, Everglades Farm Equipment Co. and Florida Coast Equipment.

Each of the program break-out sessions were offered in both English and Spanish languages, covering six safety topics. Training program organizers and presenters' goals were to inform workers about personal safety, food

safety and hygiene, and equipment safety for the sustainability of an industry known worldwide for peerless quality grapefruit.

According to Parker Platts, one of the event's top organizers and Extension Agent I-Fruit Crops, with the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) St. Lucie County Cooperative Extension Service, agriculture is still rated among the top 10 most dangerous industries.

## NEW TRAINING FOR 2015

Platts said two new training videos were added this year to increase the workers' knowledge of potential accidents and



Dr. J. Antonio Tovar, Florida Health Department Pesticide Poison Investigator

prevention techniques: one for ladder usage; a second, for safe operation of agricultural tractors.

## FIRST VISIT FROM FLORIDA HEALTH DEPARTMENT PESTICIDE POISON INVESTIGATOR

A first-time guest was the newly appointed Florida Health Department Pesticide Poison Investigator, Dr. J. Antonio Tovar. He is the state's sole pesticide investigator and was present to persuade attendees to report incidences of acute pesticide poisoning to their supervisors.



Parket Platt and Christine Kelly-Begazo, Director for the UF/IFAS Indian River County Extension River County Extension, discuss worker safety

Dr. Tovar set-up an information booth and communicated personally with event attendees during breaks from information sessions.

He said, "The workers' health is the most important goal we have. Reporting any incident is the first step to protecting everyone's health."

Dr. Tovar added that many workers are reticent in making pesticide reports and praised their work to produce food. He urged those with whom he spoke to wear protection gear and to recognize the signs of pesticide poisoning: light nausea and vomiting.

## WORKERS' HYGIENE AND FOOD SAFETY

Christine Kelly-Begazo, Director for the University of Florida/IFAS Indian River County Extension, presented a session on Good Hygiene and Food Safety. As a result of research conducted by her colleague, Karla Lenfesty, UF/IFAS St. Lucie County Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Services, she

*"I would like to urge local agricultural company leaders to send their staff members to this training event each year so that their employees will understand how to protect themselves, the food supply, and their employers."*



Industry representative Ward Gunter and West Palm Beach Farm Safety and Agriculture Labor Education Extension Agent Cesar Asuaje, instruct participants as they prepare for the Tractor Rodeo.

discovered that most agricultural workers are unaware of how many times they must wash their hands while working with food.

Kelly-Begazo said there is a direct correlation with food contamination and workers' hygiene habits while working. "We strive to tell the worker they need to wash their hands constantly while working with food," she said. "Karla's research showed that the workers do wash their hands an acceptable number of times if they are reminded at least once monthly."

Good personal hygiene, and in particular clean hands, is necessary to prevent the spread of illness between workers, such as flu or colds, and to avoid food contamination, said Kelly-Begazo.

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Pesticide and food safety were some of the foremost safety issues covered on the day of the Worker Safety Training Event, in addition to equipment handling segments.

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"Most of the fatalities related to the industry involve automobiles," said Platts.

## FLORIDA HIGHWAY PATROL REPRESENTATIVE

Mark Wysocki, a representative from the Florida Highway Patrol imparted safety tips for driving a wide range of work vehicles. They also reminded the workers of the dangers of using smart cell phones while operating any vehicle. Texting while driving, they emphasized, is now illegal.

## ST. LUCIE COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT FIRST AID DEMONSTRATION

Representatives from the St. Lucie County Fire District provided instruction in First Aid techniques, with UF/IFAS Agricultural Technician Darren Cole interpreting in fluent Spanish.



Event participants record data during Citrus Disease Identification competition

Other compelling sessions featured topics such as: disease identification and new labeling procedures for agriculture and landscaping chemicals.

Dr. Mark Ritenour, UF/IFAS Professor of Horticulture and an expert in Postharvest fruit handling, re-emphasized the importance of workers' safety and hygiene when handling fresh fruit products.

"Every year new rules are proposed to regulate food safety production," said Ritenour. "Separate rules are written for packing houses to protect food from contamination."

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## PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Program leaders were from IRREC, along with UF/IFAS Extension leadership and agents from St. Lucie, Indian River Okeechobee, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties.

Professor of Agricultural Engineering, Dr. Brian Boman, represented IRREC; Christine Kelly-Begazo, Director for the Indian River County Extension Service; Anita Neal, Director for the St. Lucie County Extension Service; and, Horticulture Extension Agent IV, Dan Culbert, representing UF/IFAS Okeechobee County Extension Service, each contributed to the event with cutting-edge expertise.

Henrique Mayer, Miami-Dade County Extension Agent, provided instruction with fertilizer calibration for landscape care spreaders.

“We spent more time on the mechanics and a pond demonstration,” said Dan Culbert, representing the Okeechobee Extension.

“We used a deflector shield to show landscapers how to keep fertilizers out of storm water ponds and off of sidewalks.

## AFTERNOON TRAINING AND COMPETITION

A full day of presentations and hands-on audience participative demonstrations were performed by upbeat team members representing growers from a four county area: Indian River, Martin, St. Lucie and Okeechobee counties.



Ed Skvarch, St. Lucie County Extension Service Agent III, leads the fertilizer calibration event



Participants calibrate fertilizers



West Palm Beach Farm Safety and Agriculture Labor Education Extension Agent Cesar Asuaje led Tractor Rodeo participants

## TRACTOR AND LANDSCAPE MOWER RODEOS

Team-spirited Tractor and Landscape Mower Rodeos, and a lawn fertilizer calibration rodeo were held mid-day. Earlier sessions provided instruction in tractor and equipment safety, disease identification and personal hygiene.

West Palm Beach Farm Safety and Agriculture Labor Education Extension Agent Cesar Asuaje, served as Master of Ceremonies for the Tractor and Mower Rodeos. His announcements were made in both English and in Spanish.

Safety, timing and proper use of heavy equipment were the skill sets observed for three contests held in the Adams Arena at the fairgrounds immediately following a barbecue luncheon.

The Tractor Rodeo, Landscape Mower Rodeo, and the Fertilizer Rodeo events were the day's highlights. Attendees cheered their co-workers on as the safest, most competent operators emerged. Tractor and mower competitors were timed. Operators who pushed over a marker lost points off of their time scores.



A 5065-E John Deer Tractor was provided by event sponsor Everglades Farm Equipment of Fort Pierce

For the competition, a 5065-E John Deer Tractor was provided by Everglades Farm Equipment of Fort Pierce. A Kubota 272 6X riding mower and fertilizer spreader were provided by Florida Coast Equipment of Fort Pierce.

Ed Skvarch, St. Lucie County Extension Service Agent III, Commercial Horticulture, led the riding Landscape Mower Rodeo. He advised each participant with safe operation techniques before they used the equipment. For many of the day's attendees, they learned multiple new skills or refined techniques they already used.

Robert Stout, who owns Indian River County-based Riverside Landscaping, said, "I always learn a lot every year I attend the Workers' Training. The fertilizers calibrations training was thorough."

Dan Culbert, UF/IFAS Okeechobee County Horticulture Extension Agent III, said "the day's presentations will likely help reduce misapplications of landscape nutrients and improve landscapers' ability to reduce runoff of fertilizers into surface and ground water."

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## FERTILIZER CALIBRATION RODEO

Culbert and Miami-Dade Commercial Horticulture Agent Henry Mayer delivered presentations on fertilizer calibration best management practices. Workers read fertilizer labels in their break-out groups and practiced setting rotary fertilizer spreaders and applying landscape fertilizer.

“We used a homeowner fertilizer product because a new fertilizer law requires users to identify the percentage of slow release nutrients in a bag,” said Culbert. “The product we used for today’s competition is considered a quick release fertilizer because, in most Treasure Coast counties and towns, the fertilizer ordinance is that less than 50 percent of fertilizer can be slow-release—it must be calibrated correctly.”



Event sponsor Deb Joneck, left, representing Florida Coast Equipment, as she presents an award to Darius Wilson, Third Place mower rodeo winner

Deb Joneck, representing Florida Coast Equipment, loaned a Kubota riding mower for the event. She said she enjoyed watching the mower competition and especially presenting the winners with awards.

Especially rousing was the full-size heavy Tractor Rodeo. Participants drove the tractor hauling a long trailer around a narrow marked obstacle course, backed up and then covered tight curves before backing into a narrow parking space. Their teams cheered the drivers as if it were a sporting event.

“The drivers need to pay close attention to not hit any of the course markers—which isn’t as easy as it looks,” said Dr. Brian Boman, Professor of Agricultural Engineering.

Participants represented about 10 growers from the 4-county area. Their experience with the large tractor ranged from none to many years of experience.

Emery Bouie, who works for Blue Goose Growers, had had a few years of experience with the heavy piece of equipment prior to the rodeo.

He said, “I learned how to better shift the tractor today.”



1<sup>st</sup> Place Tractor Rodeo Winner, Juan Pablo Zamora, IMG Citrus, Inc.

## TRACTOR RODEO WINNERS

The First Place Winner for the Tractor Rodeo was a clear champion. Juan Pablo Zamora, representing IMG Citrus, Inc., finished with a record-time of only 144 seconds to successfully complete the drive. Zamora also completed the Citrus Disease Identification with a perfect



From left to right are: Ward Gunter, representing event sponsor Everris; Juan Pablo Zamora, who placed first in the Tractor Rodeo; Cassie Kirtland, who tied first with Zamora and Loretta Myers in the Citrus Disease Identification competition, and Dr. Brian Boman

score, though his score was tied with two other contestants.

Second and Third Place Tractor Rodeo winners were nearly tied, with ending scores only 2 seconds apart.

When asked how he performed so well in the tractor rodeo, Zamora said, "It's what I do," with a wide smile.

Place winners for each competition event were as follows:

### Tractor Rodeo Results:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Juan Pablo Zamora, IMG Citrus, Inc.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Alton Kelly, Hamilton Agriculture
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Eliasim Hernandez, Sexton Groves Inc.

### Citrus Disease Identification Results:

Three Tied 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winners (all perfect scores):

- Juan Pablo Zamora, IMG Citrus, Inc.;
- Cassie Kirtland, University of Florida/IFAS Indian River Research and Education Center; and,
- Loretta Myers, U.S. Department of Agriculture Horticultural Research Laboratory

*A special thank you is due to event sponsors:*

*Everris*

*Everglades Farm Equipment Co.  
and Florida Coast Equipment*

### Mower Rodeo Results:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: David Davy Burney, St. Lucie County Recreation and Facilities
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Darius Wilson, St. Lucie County Recreation and Facilities
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Mike McFarland, UF/IFAS St. Lucie County Extension

### Fertilizer Calibration Results:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place: Rick De Santiago, Maintenance Technician III, St. Lucie County Recreation and Facilities
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Laconia Boatwright, Maintenance Equipment Operator I, St. Lucie County Recreation and Facilities
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: Darius Wilson, Maintenance Technician III, St. Lucie County Recreation and Facilities

Overall, IMG Citrus' employees ranked highest during the event's competitive events, regaining the coveted "Indian River Cup," which was presented to the producer's leaders at this year's Citrus Show Banquet.

The University of Florida Grove Worker Training 13<sup>th</sup> Annual event is only one year ahead, one week prior to the Citrus Show.

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