

## **Agriculture benefits all Florida citizens**

The value of agricultural production to Florida's economy is staggering. Agriculture provides positive impact on the economy and environment of Florida to the benefit of all citizens.

Florida's agricultural industry creates almost 800,000 jobs and has an economic impact of close to \$100 billion annually. Nationally Florida ranks in the top five or six states in cash farm receipts.

Florida is first in the U.S. for sales of snap beans, fresh market tomatoes, cucumbers for fresh market, cucumbers for pickles, bell peppers, squash and watermelons. Florida ranks first in the U.S. in the production of oranges, grapefruit, tangerines and sugarcane for sugar.

Florida is second in the nation in sales of greenhouse and nursery products, sweet corn and strawberries. Florida is fourth in the U.S. in value of production of honey.

As of January 1, 2006, Florida farms and ranches had 1,690,000 cattle, including dairy animals.

Close to half of Florida's 34 million acres consist of forestland and the estimated value of all forest products and services produced is almost \$8 billion.

Florida's farm-gate value of commercial aquaculture, which includes the production of everything from alligators to aquatic plants and catfish to tropical fish, is about \$100 million.

More than 42,000 Florida farms supply over 280 essential commodities to customers throughout North America and to more than 100 international trading partners.

Agriculture includes more than farms. Services, processing, packaging, marketing, transportation, wholesaling and retailing all are components of Florida's agricultural industry. Florida has a broad area of additional services such as lawn care, pest control, golf courses, natural resources and recreational areas.

Environmental horticulture, including landscape plants, flowers, foliage plants and turfgrass, is no small part of Florida's agriculture. Florida's nursery and landscape industry is the nation's second largest. Nursery crops are one of the largest agricultural commodity groups in Florida. In 2005, total sales by Florida nursery, landscape service firms and horticulture retailers were \$15.2 billion.

Florida agriculture is a major economic driver along with tourism and construction but the agricultural economy does not react to economic downturns in the same way that the other drivers do. Generally, the diversity that characterizes the Florida agricultural economy creates a stable economic platform that helps stabilize the state's economy.

The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) has played a major role in the development, support and expansion of this very important part of our diverse state through its research, teaching and extension programs. We all benefit from this vital industry. Sometimes we just need to be reminded.

Sources of information include: UF/IFAS, Florida Farm Bureau Federation and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, February 19, 2008