

Inside This Issue:

The Farm Worker &
the Future of Florida
Agriculture

Pages 1-2

Briefing about Florida
Agriculture

Page 3

Stakeholder Panel

Pages 4-5

Bird Sightings
in Immokalee

Page 5

Day 3:
Final Thoughts

Page 6



The Farm Worker & the Future of Florida Agriculture

Immokalee, "My Home," was founded and named by Seminole Indians who are indigenous to Collier County. They may have been the first group to plant seeds in the area.

At midday, the town's main street boasts the vibrant colors and people of the community. When we visited the area, our first stop was a market parking lot at which each morning about 500 field workers congregate to be picked by their employers. Many of the workers come from different ethnic backgrounds.

Most of the immigrants who have made the trek to Immokalee come so in hopes of finding work in order to improve the quality of life, both for

themselves and their families.

What many of the workers find here is actually not much different than their home countries. Many live in conditions that are below U.S. poverty standards and appear to be in violation of building regulations. Landlords hold a monopoly on businesses in the area and their votes and voices are heard the most at county commission meetings. Crime, drugs, and gangs exist in this remote town; indicators of the economic standards that farm workers are being forced to live under. *(continued on page 2)*

Contact Information:

NRLI

P.O. Box 110240

Gainesville, FL 32611-0230

342-846-1511

<http://nrli.ifas.ufl.edu>

The Farm Worker & the Future of Florida Agriculture (continued)

Despite these adverse conditions, the town is full of wonderful people comprised of many groups committed to improve the opportunities for all who make Immokalee their home.

We visited the single wide mobile homes where many of the local farm workers live, with as many as 17 in a single trailer and each paying \$50 per week. Within walking distance from the trailers, we saw community amenities including new schools, a homeless shelter, churches, a soup kitchen, and a one stop career-service center. We noticed throughout the town where the county's code enforcement had made efforts to remove buildings unfit for living, and saw the largest Habitat for Humanity community in the nation.

The heart of the city is the State Farmers' Market, which is open daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Here one can purchase fresh agriculture products from Immokalee

and international markets. Customers even arrive in private planes to purchase what is indeed some of the best food in the world! Vendor space is rented according to annual, seasonal and daily needs. "Pisqueros" or field workers are employed as subcontractors on seasonal field crops.

There is an IFAS Extension Office in town, which is home to more than 320 acres used for agricultural research. In addition, Extension programs are frequently offered to the local agricultural community. Extension Agents provide information and services on various topics, including on the latest technological agricultural advances.



Photo by Laila Racevskis



Photo by Melody Ray-Culp



Photo by Melody Ray-Culp

Top: NRRI project team members and local farm workers discuss agricultural practices in the area. Top right: Fellows are welcomed to Immokalee, Native American for "my home." Top bottom: Migrant farm workers in the area participate in the discussion to provide insight concerning the local agricultural industry.

BRIEFING ABOUT *FLORIDA AGRICULTURE*

In 2007, Florida had 40,000 commercial farms, having an average size of 250 acres and utilizing 10 million acres in farming.

The 2005 Florida Agriculture Censes (conducted every five years) ranked Florida 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 also ranked first in the country in the value of production of oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, and sugarcane for sugar and seed.

Florida ranked second in the U.S. in sales of greenhouse and nursery products, sweet corn, and strawberries; it ranked fourth in value of production of honey; and ranked 12th in beef cows and 18th in total cattle. As of January 1, 2006, all cattle and calves on Florida farms and ranches, including dairy cattle, totaled 1,690,000 heads.

Robert Halman, Collier County Extension Director, opened the NRLI session with a warm welcome. He discussed Florida's Agriculture - "looking back, around and forward." Fritz Roka, assistant professor and economist, UF-IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center, focused on current agriculture, natural resources and social welfare in Florida; and how peoples' values are shaped regarding natural resources. ■

Right: Robert Halman, Collier County Extension Director, welcomes NRLI Fellows.



Photo by Melody Ray-Culp

The Fellows visited the IFAS extension office to learn what issues affect the community in Immokalee.



Photo by Melody Ray-Culp

Stakeholder Panel



Photo by Melody Ray-Culp

NRLI Fellow Elena Bastidas moderated the stakeholder panel, which included a member of a grower family and a local agriculture attorney, a Collier County commissioner; as well as representatives from the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, the Redlands Christian Migrant Association, the Farm Workers Association of Florida, and the University of Florida College of Public Health.

We heard each panelist's perspective on the current state of the agriculture industry. The discussion included the conditions in which farm workers live and work. Katherine English, who comes from a lineage of farm workers and is now part of a grower family, reflected on a time when family members were field workers who interacted with many other families of workers in Collier County and other surrounding agricultural communities.

The panelists from The Farm Workers Association of Florida and The Redlands Christian Migrant Association shared similar concerns about the treatment of farm workers. These organizations work hard to ensure that the quality of life for farm workers is the best it could possibly be. The representatives from participating groups spoke well on behalf of their constituents.

A member of the stakeholder panel expressed a different point of view. He mentioned his efforts to improve the condition of farm workers in Immokalee. However, he did not seem fully convinced that it is the responsibility of the community to support agricultural workers, and believes the growers who employ the farm workers should be the responsible ones.

While endorsing development of agriculture land use, some members of the panel do not appear to object to natural land protection efforts.

Finally, as a man of few words, Paul Monaghan from USF provided some key points that encouraged listeners to ponder on the topic from a less emotional perspective. Agriculture flourishes in Florida because of cheap, good land and water. If these things do not remain available, agriculture may meet its demise despite all efforts to prevent it.

Although the panel represented different stakeholders, many of its members shared similar concerns. The discussion, while clearly evoking an emotional reaction from most of the panelists, was characterized by a high degree of respect for diverse perspectives and positions on the issue. ■

Agriculture flourishes in Florida because of cheap, good land and water. If these things do not remain available, the future of agriculture may meet its demise despite all efforts to prevent it.

- Paul Monaghan

Many of the issues raised at this session apply to agriculture around the state of Florida. The availability of an agricultural work force, the role of technology, the impact of land conversion for development, and trade policies will continue to shape agriculture in Florida.

Bird Sightings in Immokalee

Compiled by Peter Johnson

While riding in the van and walking near the hotel and the IFAS Extension Office, the Fellows sighted the following birds:

Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Double-Crested Cormorant
Cattle Egret
White Ibis
Wood Stork
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey

Swallow-Tailed Kite
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Red-Shouldered Hawk
Crested Caracara
American Kestrel
Sandhill Crane
Killdeer
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Barred Owl
Loggerhead Shrike
Northern Mockingbird
Northern Cardinal
Red-Winged Blackbird

Day 3: Final Thoughts

NRLI Project Team

Wendy-Lin Bartels
Roy R. Carriker
Jonathan Dain
Bruce Delaney
Marta Hartmann
Bob Jones
Burl F. Long
Laila A. Racevskis
Tom Taylor

2008 NRLI Class VIII Fellows

Steven Allen
Elena Bastidas
Tatiana Borisova
Kevin Brown
Diana Ferguson
Bryan Fluech
Kevin Hennessy
Chrissy Hensel
Dianne Hughes
Peter Johnson
Jennison Kipp
Carol Lippincott
Tyler Macmillan
Debra McQueen
Lisa Marie Phillips
Jane Provancha
Melody Ray-Culp
Joanne Semmer
Charles Shinn
Jennifer Winters

Report Contributors

Joanne Semmer
Jennifer Winters

Report Layout

Brenda Lee

During a session about process design, the Fellows and project team members discussed the following:

1. Set Goal
2. Stakeholders
3. Process Design
4. Seven Types of Meeting Goals
 - ◇ Share Information
 - ◇ Advance the thinking
 - ◇ Improve Communications
 - ◇ Build Community
 - ◇ Build Capacity
 - ◇ Make Decisions
 - ◇ Obtain Input
5. Five Levels of Involvement
 - ◇ Presenting and Reporting
 - ◇ Comments and Questions
 - ◇ Extensive Discussion
 - ◇ Convergence Alignment
 - ◇ Ownership and Commitment
6. Scenario Planning
 - ◇ High Unemployment
 - ◇ Higher Prices of Agriculture
 - ◇ Urban Sprawl
 - ◇ Negative Environmental Impact

Interesting quotes from the session

- ◇ ***“If you’re not at the table, you’re probably on the menu.”*** Charles Shinn
- ◇ ***Ownership – “No one washes a rental car”***

This report forms part of a series written by current NRLI Fellows. The reports are a product of the NRLI experiential-learning approach and are not formally peer-reviewed.