University of Florida

CALS Connection

Volume 7, Spring 2007

UF looks to the future with Organic Crop Production

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Sunbelt Agriculture Expo Gets a Touch of UF

UF UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

Message from the Dean

This past year, my first as Dean of CALS, has been filled with new adventures, new people, and a steep learning curve! Every day has brought new excitement to serving the students, faculty and staff of a premier college.

As you will see in other parts of this CALS Connection, the new CALS Administration is in place and ready to provide support for and leadership to the many programs that the college offers. We have started the process of assembling our strategic initiatives, and we are revising the committee structure of the college to gain more and better input from faculty and students. Here are some examples to meet the mission and vision of CALS.

Charlotte Emerson is increasing our recruitment efforts, and we are working closely with UF Admissions to ensure that we attract and enroll a balanced undergraduate population. Charlotte is also working closely with the CALS Alumni and Friends Board to include more alumni in activities.

Chris Vitelli has developed Solutions Seminars to help students develop and enhance their out-of-classroom skills in preparation for the world of work and/or graduate and professional school. Chris is expanding the CALS Ambassadors program to include an international study course to Egypt.

Elaine Turner provides leadership for taking a look at all of our majors and courses to be sure we are effectively and efficiently offering what should be a part of a 21st-century land-grant college. Elaine also works closely with the Teaching Resources Center in the college to enhance student learning through improved teaching.

Mark Rieger is assuming the leadership for the CALS Upper Division Honors Program and our study abroad initiatives. The goal is to increase student participation in both, as well as improving the experiences themselves. Mark also coordinates the decision-making process as departments and centers expand off-campus courses and degree programs.

With an increasing student population and these important initiatives, CALS will also be a central partner in the UF Capital Campaign. Private support of programs is essential in public education, and the 4,800 students in CALS deserve our support.

Chris Vitelli, Dr. Elaine Turner, Dr. Kirby Barrick, Dr. Mark Rieger and Charlotte Emerson are excited about being at UF.

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Allison Eckhardt, Design & Layout
Allison Eckhardt, Editor in Chief
Dr. Elaine Turner, Adviser

Who's Who in the College of Ag

The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Florida has some new additions to the administrative

Dr. Kirby Barrick Dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

"The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences is a large and exciting college with resources to be even better. The faculty and students are of the highest quality in our college."

As Dean of CALS Dr. Barrick is responsible for overseeing all programs and students within CALS, and maintains contact with UF to keep informed of all university business.

Educational Background: Ohio State, B.S., M.S., PhD in Agricultural Education

Favorite Hobbies: Tying in well with his agricultural background Dr. Barrick enjoys caring for and landscaping his lawn, for relaxation.

"I am really just a farm boy and I enjoy working outside in my yard," Barrick said.

Along with landscaping, Barrick enjoys reading light mysteries and currently, books about Egypt.

Something Most People Would Not Know: Another favorite past time of Dr. Barrick's is cooking. His favorite dish to make is cheesecake.

Advice to Students: Dr. Barrick advises all students to study abroad even if for a short term period.

"Studying abroad is a life-altering experience that all students should take full advantage of," Barrick said.

Charlotte Emerson Director of Recruitment and Alumni Services

"As a student I realized some of the possibilities that were available for me, but now as faculty, I can see even more opportunities for students and alumni."

As Director of Recruitment and Alumni Services Charlotte Emerson is responsible for recruiting new students to the University of Florida, specifically to the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. This includes visiting community colleges, attending job fairs and conventions, and being present at alumni functions to keep the strong bond between the alumni and CALS that is crucial for success.

Educational Background: University of Florida, B.S. Agricultural Education; Florida Gulf Coast College M.S. Curriculum Instruction.

Favorite Aspect of CALS: The diversity of the students, faculty and the college make many opportunities available for CALS students.

Exciting Future Alumni Events: This spring and summer CALS and the CALS Alumni will be hosting the golf tournament and the fishing tournament, as well as many other fun regional CALS alumni gatherings.

Advice to Students: Emerson stressed the importance of making memorable friendships and contacts throughout your college career. Also, students should talk to their professors and at least introduce themselves to the Dean of the college.

By Jessica Rothering

department and they would like to introduce themselves to the students and alumni.

Dr. Mark Rieger Associate Dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

"I would like to see the undergraduate research and study abroad programs grow in an intelligent way to meet the needs of the students."

Dr. Rieger is one of two Associate Deans for CALS and is responsible for all of CALS graduate students.

Educational Background: Penn State University, B.S.; University of Georgia, M.S.; University of Florida, PhD.

Goals for the Future: Dr. Rieger is hoping to expand the honors program in the college, as well as undergraduate research programs and study abroad opportunities.

Favorite Hobbies: Dr. Rieger just recently moved back to Florida in early October and is eager to pursue some of his favorite past times, such as golfing, biking and growing a garden.

Hopes for Alumni: Dr. Rieger hopes that alumni will come back and be motivational speakers, and talk to students about their successes, as a way of validating that UF students are successful upon graduation.

Dr. Elaine Turner Associate Dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

Best Part of CALS: "The people, top to bottom, side to side. We have great students, faculty and administration here in CALS that really care."

Dr. Turner is one of two Associate Deans of CALS, and is responsible for undergraduate students and programs within CALS.

Educational Background: Kansas State UniversityB.S. Dietetics; Purdue University, M.S. and Ph.D., Food Sciences and Nutrition.

Why UF?: Dr. Turner was intrigued by UF and CALS because of integration of faculty teaching and extension to both students and the general public here at CALS.

"I like the combination of teaching and extension," Turner said. "I am attracted to the general teaching and then with a large university like UF we are able to pass that on to the public and benefit them as well."

Most Memorable Moment at UF: Dr. Turner was awarded both the CALS adviser and teaching awards. These awards are peer-evaluated and meant the most to Dr. Turner since it was from her peers.

Advice to Students and Alumni: Dr. Turner suggests that everyone remembers to keep something in their life that is special to them, whether it is an artistic activity, sport or special activity with friends.

Chris Vitelli Director of Student Development

"I want CALS to provide students all the tools necessary for them to be successful upon graduation from UF by providing first class student development programs."

As the Director of Student Development, Chris Vitelli is responsible for creating programs and opportunities for CALS students. He is also responsible for leading and maintaining the CALS Ambassadors, students who represent the college at various functions.

Educational Background: Unversity of Florida, B.S. Agricultural Education; Harvard, Ed. M. in Administration and Social Policy.

Goals for the Future: A leadership institute for CALS students with practical components of leadership theory, practice and service. In addition, we want to enhance our career resource programs by connecting with current students with the more than 18,000 active CALS alumni, Vitelli said.

Something Most Would Not Know: "I won the showcase showdown on the Price is Right in 2001," Vitelli said.

Favorite Hobbies: Topping the list of Mr. Vitelli's favorite hobbies are golfing, traveling, spending time with his wife, and of course, college football.

Hopes for Alumni: Mr. Vitelli believes that alumni can provide practical experiences for students. Whether it is through an internship, networking for a job or graduate school, alumni can help students be successful in their field of study.

Rooted in the Business

By Katelyn Crow

One University of Florida alumna has rooted herself in Dade County as a horticulturist and grower, specializing in rare plant material.

Sylvia Gordon, owner of Landscape by Sylvia Gordon, graduated from UF in 1979 with a bachelor's degree in horticulture.

"The University of Florida's environmental horticulture program is an excellent tool for teaching someone how to go out into the world," Gordon said. "I learned a lot from my experiences at UF."

Gordon specializes in plants that are rare or not native to Florida. She also grows uncommon variations of common plant species to differentiate her products from competitors.

After hurricanes Andrew and Katrina, Gordon shifted the focus of her business from a high-end residential landscaping company to a business specializing in atypical plant material.

Gordon said it took her 10 years after Hurricane Andrew to change the business from full-time landscaping and maintenance to full-time specialty grower. The transition would have been harder had it not been for her education from UF, she said.

"My education from the University of Florida was so well rounded and so good, I was always able to have my hands in growing and design installation," Gordon said.

Gordon's interest in horticulture began as a young child, shadowing her father who was a landscape architect.

"I was always meant to be in this field and UF is the No. 1 agricultural school in Florida," Gordon said.

Out of college, Gordon worked as a wholesale grower in Ocala and later in Miami. She then began her business in 1984 out of sheer necessity.

"It was either continue to collect unemployment or start my own business," said Gordon, in reference to the recession and widespread layoffs of the early 1980s.

Making a Splash!

By Melissa Miller

Getting wet is part of the job description for University of Florida graduate Tonya Clauss. As the only veterinarian for the Georgia Aquarium, the world's largest aquarium, she is responsible for the health care of more than 120,000 animals.

Clauss cares for a variety of animals that represent more than 500 species from around the globe, including beluga whales, whale sharks, largetooth sawfish, great hammerhead sharks and lagoon jellies.

On a daily basis, Clauss takes action to prevent disease by vaccinating animals and treating illnesses.

"My duties are to help establish and carry out quarantine procedures and to set up preventative treatments and vaccination protocols," Clauss said. "I'm basically in charge of any needs that might occur."

Tonya Clauss performs a physical on a loggerhead turtle at the Georgia Aquarium. Clauss received three degrees from UF.

Clauss earned three degrees at the University of Florida to prepare her for this job: a bachelor's degree with dual majors in animal sciences and wildlife ecology and conservation, a master's in environmental engineering sciences and a doctorate of veterinary medicine.

Clauss decided to stay at UF for all of her degrees because of the variety of programs the university offers.

"I was considering going to vet school, and I was very interested in the wildlife ecology program," Clauss said.

Clauss worked at UF's School of Veterinary Medicine, specializing in the equine program. She also volunteered in the wildlife and medicine ward.

Clauss knew that she didn't want to be a large animal veterinarian for the rest of her life. She believes that her professors saw something in her and helped her to find her passion: aquatic life.

"I wanted to do something I could use my interest in aquatics to do conservation and work on species that no one had ever worked on before," Clauss said.

Leading into the Future

By Brittany Saranko

One College of Agricultural and Life Sciences student embraced agriculture in the world of business and briefcases as the leader of a prestigious national organization.

As the student section president of the American Agricultural Economics Association, Alicia Taylor represents her university, college and peers at the national level. She is the second student from the University of Florida to hold the title.

In her position, Taylor leads a team of nine officers and works closely with four advisers. Her main responsibility includes coordinating and planning the undergraduate events that will take place at the 2007 national meeting in Portland, Ore.

Because most of the communication she has with the officers and advisers takes place through e-mails and telephone conferences, with minimal face-to-face contact, Taylor has learned how to use different tools to manage communication. "It has helped me become a better facilitator," she said.

Careful organization and adhering to deadlines has also helped keep Taylor focused on specific tasks that needed to be accomplished. This way of handling responsibility is not anything new for Taylor.

"[Taylor] is always on top of things," said Jason Beutke, Taylor's fellow officer in UF's chapter of the National Agri-Marketing Association. "She is very hardworking and professionally motivated."

The organizational responsibilities that Taylor has learned will effectively place her beyond her peers in future roles. These are valuable business lessons that she will carry with her throughout her career.

"I have learned a lot during my time in office," Taylor said. "It has been a fun experience, and I wish the next president nothing but the best."

CALS Feeds the County

By Amanda Brumby

The Agricultural and Life Sciences College Council continued its annual canned food drive and Cowboy Ball this past holiday season.

The ALSCC collected canned foods on the University of Florida campus until Dec. 1 to donate to the Children's Table, a rural Alachua county food bank.

"Our goal was to collect more than 5,000 cans this year with the help of the numerous student organizations part of the college council," said Katharina Fetten, an ALSCC social committee member.

The ALSCC encouraged all student organizations, as well as individuals, at UF to participate. Boxes to collect the cans were set out in department hallways and also in the organization advisers' offices, so they were accessible to all students and faculty. Some faculty members went as far as giving extra credit for cans donated.

Anna Flaig, the ALSCC social committee chairperson, said many UF organizations donate back to the local community, but often rural Alachua county is forgotten.

Students Karen Ann Cranford and Anna Flaig presented over 6,000 cans to Mr. and Mrs. Brown from Children's Table.

"This is our community and through this we are able to give back," said Flaig.

The Cowboy Ball was the social event that the ALSCC holds at the conclusion of the canned food drive. This event is held to allow students who were involved with the drive to come together and raise additional money for the cause.

Participants of the Cowboy Ball were asked for a donation of $5 and all of the proceeds went towards the Children's Table.

Music, provided by a radio station, and a bonfire, set the atmosphere at Whitehurst Lodge where about 120 people enjoyed food that was provided by local sponsors. In addition to these activities, the Food and Resource Economics Club held a "Kiss the Pig" competition that raised over $500.

Over 6,000 cans were donated to the Children's Table, with the Food and Resource Economics Club donating the most and the Gator Collegiate Cattlewomen's Club running a close second.

Organic crop production: the *natural* choice for CALS' new specialization

By Angelina C. Toomey

With sales of certified organic foods reaching $13.8 billion in 2005, the organic industry is taking off, and the University of Florida certainly wants to be there for the ride. To secure its place in line, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences has launched a new specialization focusing on organic production.

Organic crop production is now being offered as an undergraduate specialization through the horticultural sciences major. Since fall 2005, the department of horticultural sciences has also offered a minor in organic and sustainable agriculture. This complements the Sustainable Crop Production and Management option in the plant science major.

"In Florida, the organic industry is expanding, and many growers are diversifying into organic markets as one way to sustain their farming operations," said horticultural sciences assistant professor Danielle Treadwell. "The purpose of the specialization is to prepare students to meet the employment needs of not just the organic industry but the agricultural industry overall."

Treadwell said that because nearly 46 percent of organic food sales occur in traditional retail outlets, such as grocery stores, there is a high demand for employees who understand both the conventional and organic industries.

Dan Cantliffe, chairman of UF's horticultural sciences department, chats with student Rachel Ben-Avraham as she examines organically grown bell pepper. (UF/IFAS)

The Horticultural Sciences Curriculum Committee conceived and developed the idea of an organic crop specialization. Rebecca Darnell, associate chair of the department of horticultural sciences who functions as the committee's chair, and Melissa Webb, academic support services coordinator, reviewed the curriculum and developed the new specialization, which was implemented in summer 2006.

The organic and sustainable agriculture minor was developed separately by Mickie Swisher, director of the Center for Organic Agriculture. Swisher said she and a committee worked for about a year to create the interdisciplinary minor.

Presently, only two other universities offer organic academic programs, Washington State University and Colorado State University, so students at the University of Florida have an opportunity to be part of a very exciting time in horticultural crop production, Webb said.

"There is currently little formal training offered from U.S. land-grant universities for organic crop production, and this new specialization will fill that gap," Treadwell said.

In addition, Webb said what makes UF's approach to organics unique is the development of two specific core courses for both the specialization and the minor.

"Students enrolled in the organic specialization in horticultural sciences receive training in both conventional and organic production methods," Treadwell said. "Further, they are trained on the regulatory aspects of organic, the process of certification, soil and pest management, and marketing."

Webb said the specialization also has a lot of flexibility, so students, with the help of an adviser, can take a variety of classes, relevant to the curriculum, that suit their interests and career goals. She also said students can benefit from this flexible curriculum and courses specific to organic crop production that cannot be found anywhere else.

"I believe that the specialization and the minor will benefit students because they are getting formal, science-based training in organic crop production, something that is unique to the University of Florida and that is in high demand from consumers and growers," Webb said.

Currently, four students are officially enrolled in the organic crop production specialization, while approximately 12 are working toward the minor. However, Darnell said she expects enrollment to grow.

"We have had numerous inquiries from potential students, and we expect enrollment to increase significantly as more students become aware of our program," she said.

Off-Campus spotlight: Plant City

By Cassandra Brown

A bachelor's degree in agricultural education and communication is now available through the off-campus program partnership between the UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center and the Hillsborough Community College Plant City campus.

Previously, the UF/IFAS Plant City Campus only offered bachelor's degrees in landscape and nursery horticulture and natural resource conservation. In August, the agricultural education program became available.

"The plan was to spend the 2006-2007 year recruiting students for the program and then begin classes in fall 2007," said Jim Dyer, coordinator of the agricultural education program. "The interest was so great, though, that we had to start classes a year early, in fall 2006."

Currently, 37 degree seeking-students are enrolled in the program. Dyer and his staff expect the program to continue to grow over the next few years.

Lower division students enrolled in the program are required to take general education classes from several areas, including sciences, math, English, fine arts, psychology and philosophy. Upper division classes are more specialized towards the area of agricultural education.

"Several teaching classes are required," said Martin Wortman, academic program coordinator at the Plant City campus. "However, because it is a degree in agricultural education, students are also required to take classes in areas like entomology, soil sciences and natural resources."

Classes for UF students are taught on the Hillsborough Community College Plant City campus. Classes are taught by HCC faculty and faculty from UF/IFAS Research Centers who specialize in entomology and nematology, plant pathology and soil and water sciences.

The degree program was started because of the growing need for agriculture teachers throughout Florida. Wortman said that many career opportunities are available at the middle school and high school levels across the state.

Students who would like to pursue a career in something other than teaching have the opportunity to pursue a career in agribusiness, Dyer said.

"The idea in agribusiness is that if a person has the human relations skills it takes to manage kids in a classroom, he or she has the human relation skills to do just about anything," he said.

Wortman and Dyer agree that the agricultural education degree program has taken off faster than expected, and is expected to grow and change over the next several years. Dyer expects the program to help produce more agriculture teachers to meet the state's growing need.

Partnership provides new opportunities for students

By Kate Campbell

The University of Florida and The Nature Conservancy celebrated their combined efforts in furthering environmental research and education at the dedication of the Ordway-Swisher Biological Research Station.

UF President Bernie Machen presided over the Nov. 4 ceremony marking the merger of the Katharine Ordway Preserve and the Carl Swisher Memorial Preserve. UF and The Nature Conservancy have partnered to establish one of the largest tracts of land used exclusively for research and education, Machen said.

The combined preserve spans approximately 9,100 acres and contains a wide variety of ecosystems and approximately 270 species of wildlife.

The more than 6,000 acres of the Katharine Ordway Preserve was originally purchased with a donation from biologist Katharine Ordway. The Nature Conservancy donated the remaining 3,000 acres of the adjoining Carl Swisher Memorial Preserve.

"We have the same vision for this land," said Virginia Tschinkel, state director for The Nature Conservancy.

The Southeastern United States has the most biologically diverse land in the country, Tschinkel said, making it necessary to protect environmentally sensitive land and to educate future generations about its importance.

University of Florida president Bernie Machen addresses the crowd at the dedication of the Ordway-Swisher Biological Research Station. (UF/IFAS)

The large amount of area and the many interacting ecosystems in the station provides a rare opportunity for research, said UF zoology professor Robert Holt.

Much of the research Holt is involved in at the station looks at the interaction of species and habitats. Development of land in Florida has limited the places available to researchers.

"It is only possible to conduct this research at an area of this size," he said.

Another plan is for the station to become the premier center in the South for fire ecology education, said Zach Prusak, Florida fire fighter for The Nature Conservancy.

The Nature Conservancy and UF have held training courses at the station on how to prescribe and conduct controlled burns, Prusak said. The course can be taken for class credit to prepare UF students for jobs in fire management.

Extensive research and education already has been conducted at the old preserve by UF students and faculty, said UF department of wildlife ecology and conservation chair John Hayes.

The department of wildlife ecology and conservation and other related departments hope to utilize the educational and research capabilities of the new Ordway-Swisher Biological Research Station even more in the years to come, Hayes said.

Sunbelt Agriculture Expo: a chance for UF to shine

After 17 years of displaying in a tent, the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences opened a new building at the Sunbelt Agricultural Expo. This building will allow UF to educate the public and showcase the new research and programs being developed.

Senior Vice President, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Dr. Jimmy Cheek gets help cutting the ribbon on the new IFAS exhibit building on the grounds of the Sunbelt Agriculture Expo.

The IFAS building followed a water theme this year, with 20 displays explaining water usage, conservation and ecosystems.

A.D. Hancock, (second from left) a 1973 graduate from Okahumpka, Fl, received a pair of tickets to the Florida-Georgia game at the alumni mixer held with the University of Georgia.

Dr. Chuck Cichra from the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences explains the anatomy of a crawfish to a student.

Tailgator: A Tradition of Success

Now in its tenth year, Tailgator gave alumni, students and friends of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences a chance to gather, learn about new happenings in the college and honor distinguished alumni, all while honoring Veteran's Day.

Erin Freel Best received the CALSAF Horizon Award from Jerry Southwell (left) President of the CALS Alumni and Friends and , Dr. Jimmy Cheek (right), Senior Vice President, Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Pat Cockrell and Woody Larson both received the CALS Award of Distinction.

Jamie Eisenberg, a Family, Youth and Community Sciences major, pictured here with her parents Meryl and Bob Eisenberg, received the CALS Alumni and Friends Scholarship.

Red and Reda Larson and Mike and Jan Martin received UF Distinguished Honorary Alumni Awards.

University of Florida
College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
P.O. Box 110270
Gainesville, FL 32611-0270

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