

April 2020

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## Tri-County Citrus Newsletter– DeSoto, Hardee, & Manatee

*I am your new Multi-County Citrus Extension Agent, serving DeSoto, Hardee, and Manatee counties. I am very happy to be in this position and I look forward to working with all of you. My goal as your agent is to assist you with the challenges you face in your operations and to keep our Florida citrus industry strong. Our industry continues to face hardships including HLB, low fruit prices, and rising production costs. I want to work cooperatively with you, our researchers, and other agencies to ensure that you have the resources you need to be profitable and successful. Here at UF/IFAS we are committed to our growers and our community. Although the extension offices are currently closed to the public, we are still here to serve you. Many of us, including myself are working remotely, and I want to assure you that I am available through email and by cell phone. I will do my best to assist you with issues that you face in your operations. Please contact me with any questions or concerns you have. I wish you and your family the best during this difficult time.*



**\*\*Please note that the information presented here on COVID-19 and the updates in policies and procedures may change. I have included links to documents and websites. Please refer to these links for the most up-to-date information.\*\***

## Events and Programs

In an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 and for the health of personnel and citizens in the community, the University of Florida has cancelled or postponed all events and meetings through the middle of May. I will keep you posted as updates become available.

## Restricted Use Pesticide

On March 20, 2020 Agriculture Commissioner Nicole “Nikki” Fried, with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumers Services issued emergency orders and rules pertaining to some of the Florida statutes. Some of the important areas these emergency rules cover, affect us in the citrus industry involving restricted use pesticide licenses, as found in Emergency Order 2020-002. All testing for pesticide licenses is suspended at this time until at least April 30, 2020. Commissioner Fried has ordered a 30-day extension for anyone with a RUP license that is expiring at this time. The 30-day extension is in effect until April 19, 2020, at which time FDACS will evaluate the situation. During this extension, anyone with an expired license will NOT be allowed to purchase restricted use pesticides. If your license is currently active and are interested in earning CEU’s, there are resources available online. As a reminder, Core CEU’s are also available on Citrus Industry magazine’s website by reading an article and submitting the corresponding quiz online. Please keep in mind that the timeframes for receiving credit for CEU’s may be affected due to the decreased staff in agency offices. This also applies to those waiting for pending test results, as they are still being processed with limited staff.

- FDACS website where the Emergency Orders are posted: <https://www.fdacs.gov/News-Events/Press-Releases/2020-Press-Releases/Commissioner-Nikki-Fried-Issues-Emergency-Orders-Rules-During-COVID-19>
- UF/IFAS Extension Pesticide Information Office, CEU courses, there are fees associated with these courses: <https://ifas-pest.catalog.instructure.com/>
- Citrus Industry Magazine, CEU articles: <http://citrusindustry.net/ceu/>

## Safety Morning

The annual Safety Morning program was on March 10, 2020. The program consisted of the annual Worker Protection Standard (WPS) handler training, and presentations on Decontamination, Respirator Safety, Tractor and Equipment Safety, Road Safety, and Basic First Aid and Heat Stress.

We offered both an English session and a Spanish session for all presentations. All attendees received a certificate of training. Sign-In sheets, which are a FDACS recordkeeping requirement, were sent out to all of the employers, along with certification cards for the employees. Thank you for your participation, we had a large number of attendees for our event. I would also like to thank my UF/IFAS colleagues and speakers from the community who gave very informative presentations and assisted me with the program.

# Resources Available to Growers

## COVID-19 and Food Safety FAQ's

While social distancing has become one of the ways to stop the spread of COVID-19, many are wondering about food safety. The University of Florida has released a FAQ's EDIS document highlighting important information about food safety for producers. The document explains answers to questions about disinfecting surfaces in facilities and equipment, what to do if a worker tests positive for the virus, and best practices for stopping the spread of the virus <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/FS/FS35100.pdf>. The University of Florida also has an EDIS page with links for more information on COVID-19. You can access the most current information available on how the coronavirus is affecting the produce safety rule:

[https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic\\_covid19](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_covid19)

## H2A Labor

Many of you rely on H2A labor to keep your operations going. The USDA has the most updated information available on how the coronavirus is affecting the H2A labor force. The Department of State – Bureau of Consular Affairs released an announcement on March 26, 2020 that covers the temporary changes to the interview process. The announcement explains the interview waiver that some first-time and returning workers are eligible to receive. Interview waivers may be granted to those without a known or potential ineligibility. On the USDA website, there is a link for FAQ's for visa operations in Mexico. There are also links to many other countries and their current policies. USDA website: <https://www.farmers.gov/manage/h2a> US Department of State: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/important-announcement-on-h2-visas.html>

## Soil Samples and Testing

Commercial producers can still send in soil samples to the Extension Soil Testing Lab, which is part of the UF/IFAS Analytical Laboratories in Gainesville. They are open and processing samples. Their mailing address is:

**UF/IFAS Analytical Services Laboratories  
Attn: Extension Soil Testing Laboratory  
2390 Mowry Road, Wallace Building #631  
P.O. Box 110740  
Gainesville, FL 32611-0740**



Soil sample bags and instructions are available at the DeSoto County Extension office located at 2150 NE Roan St., Arcadia.

The extension office is currently closed to the public, but the bags are located outside the door. You may also use a clean paper bag to send in your samples. The sample submission form and instructions are available to download from this link <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/SS/SS59800.pdf>. For more information on the UF/IFAS Analytical Laboratory, please see their website: <https://soilslab.ifas.ufl.edu>

## Nematode Assay Lab

The UF/IFAS Nematode Assay Lab in Gainesville is still open M-F and are accepting nematode samples. Sampling procedures and mailing instructions can be found on their website <http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/nematology-assay-lab/>. The costs for samples are: standard soil sample \$25-35 each, soil & root sample \$50-70 each, and species identification \$100 each. Payment can be made either with a check or credit card. Samples from groves can be submitted using the Non-Turf sample form: [http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/notes/Forms/NON\\_Turf\\_Nematode\\_Assay\\_Form\\_9\\_19.pdf](http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/notes/Forms/NON_Turf_Nematode_Assay_Form_9_19.pdf).

## Governor DeSantis issues “Stay-at-Home” Order

Gov. Ron DeSantis issued a “Stay-at-Home” order for the state of Florida that will go into effect at 12:01am on April 3, 2020 and last until April 30, 2020, unless it is modified. Food and agriculture are deemed part of the Essential Critical Infrastructure, allowing agricultural employees to still be allowed to work. Here is the link to the website explaining the guidelines and regulations: <https://www.cisa.gov/identifying-critical-infrastructure-during-covid-19>. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has released a letter with suggested language for agriculture workers to carry with them, identifying them as part of the essential critical infrastructure workforce. Employers can fill in the letter where appropriate and give to their employees.

**If you receive my newsletter via email, I have attached the fillable letter as well as an example letter showing the information that needs to be included in your email.**

**If you received my newsletter through the mail, these examples are enclosed. Please email me if you need an electronic copy of the fillable form for your business.**

## Citrus Diseases, Disorders, and Pest Identification

If you have plant diseases, disorders, or pests that you need assistance with, please let me know. You may send me pictures of your issue or we can utilize video conferencing to identify your problem. Although I am not in the office, I am still available to help you. I will use my resources and assistance from our Citrus Extension researchers who have expertise in these areas.

# All In For Citrus Podcast

Every month the University of Florida and Southeast AgNet provide the All In For Citrus Podcast. Dr. Michael Rogers, Director of the Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred, gives an update on important information for our industry. The guest speakers each month are researchers from the different research and education centers around the state. They provide research updates and give more insight to their programs and the issues they are working on for our industry. Tune in every month for this informative podcast, which can be found on Citrus Industry magazine's website: <http://citrusindustry.net/allinforcitrus/>  
You can also sign-up for the All In For Citrus Newsletter by going to: <https://us19.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=d957a5fbf74dc2f638f6a54f7&id=96efd45948>



## Final Thoughts...

As we all try to navigate through these uncertain times, please remember to keep your health and your family's health a top priority. Follow the CDC guidelines for social distancing, work remotely if possible, and wash your hands frequently. Encourage your co-workers to practice the same health precautions even out in the grove. I am hopeful that soon we will all be back to our normal operations, and I'm looking forward to future field visits and grower meetings, training classes and workshops. I will keep you informed of updates and resources as they become available. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,  
Ajia Paolillo