

Suwannee Valley Watermelon Crop Update- April 28, 2019

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Hold the Date, more details to come:

Suwannee Valley Watermelon Grower Field Day

Monday, May 13, 2019; 5:30- 8:00 pm

Trolley Tour of 6 watermelon research trials (5:30-7:30 pm)

Dinner (7:30-8:00 pm)

Pesticide Applicator and Certified Crop Advisor CEUs available

Location NFREC-Suwannee Valley, 8202 CR 417, Live Oak FL 32060

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Suwannee CARES Event (farmer recognition program for excellence in environmental stewardship) is this Thursday, May 2 beginning at 6 pm at the UF/IFAS North Florida REC- Suwannee Valley, 8202 CR 417, Live Oak, FL 32060. You all are invited, no registration needed. Florida's watermelon queen will be there serving fresh, delicious Florida watermelon.

The past week was a week of very little change in the presence of any diseases. We are on the lookout and I would expect to begin seeing a few things pop up this coming week or so. We will update everyone as soon as we see anything confirmed. Until then, my suggestion is to stay with Chlorothalonil (Bravo or other generic) or mancozeb (Manzate or Penncozeb or other) as the main fungicide, but I would suggest adding Quintec or Torino as a preventative spray for powdery mildew. Once fruit get half grown or so, you should drop chlorothalonil from the program due to risk of fruit burn. It seems continually unlikely that bacterial disease will show up in the near future, therefore, NO COPPER at this time.

As expected, the older leaves at the bases of plants sure look rough with lots of dead, sand-blasted, wind-burned leaves. Keep a close eye on older leaves and if new active disease spots appear, let us know so we can get any new diseases identified.

Most fields should be at a stage where the bed fertilizer is not contributing much nitrogen or potassium, and fertigation is the main nutrient delivery method. Tissue testing or petiole-sap testing should be used to fine tune the rates being used. Most applications at about 2.0 lbs of nitrogen and potash per acre per day seem to result in optimum levels.

There have been several discussions this past week regarding "setting fruit". It appears as though there have been high percentages of fruit being set in the past couple weeks. There may be situations where fields have had some very small fruit (1-3 days old) that have been aborted or "kicked". The exact reason or reasons that this may or may not occur can be difficult to determine. Fruit abortion can result from poor pollination, plant stress (dry soils, water-logged soils, extremely high or low temperatures), low light conditions, and can also occur in extremely high nitrogen levels or very low nitrogen levels. The extremely high winds April 19 and 20 and the rainy days then, certainly did not help fruit set. Once a plant sets a few or several fruit, it may abort fruit because the plant can't support any more at that time.

So, what can you do? My suggestion is to try to keep things at optimum levels and avoid extremes. On other thing to realize is that a watermelon plant simply **can not set a fruit at each female bloom**. It is not going to happen, therefore, fruit abortion at times during the season should be expected. Here is a little math exercise to demonstrate my point. **If you have 2,000 plants per acre and harvest and sell two fifteen-pound watermelons per plant, the yield is 60,000 pounds per acre.** Of course, not all plants survive and not all plants produce marketable fruit, but you get the idea. Thinking that you need to “set” 4-5 or more fruit per plant to do well is simply not the case. Once you start harvesting, a plant may begin to set fruit again since the fruit load has been reduced at that time but let’s worry about that later.