

Suwannee Valley Watermelon Crop Update- June 3, 2020  
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Hello watermelon growers and allied industry as well. This update is provided by collecting information from your UF/IFAS Extension agents in the Suwannee Valley, IFAS state Extension specialists, and other industry field men. Thanks to all of you who contribute to help our growers.

Many questions this week were regarding fertilizer inputs and spray inputs as we approach the end of the harvest period. We realize some of you are winding down in some fields while others are still going strong and wanting to extend the season as long as possible with the strong market. We are now at a point in the season where we have seen just about everything, you name it. I think the best strategy as we reach the later stages of harvest is to focus and invest in those things that are priority items. Even though we are seeing some of just about every disease known to infect watermelon, let's think about the ones that really matter right now,...the ones that can terminate the season for you earlier than you may want. Those two diseases appear to be downy mildew and powdery mildew. Both are still very active in the Suwannee Valley area and need your continued attention. For these two diseases, you may need to continue applications until you are 10 days to final harvest.

**Downy mildew** management continues to be Orondis Ultra or Ranman in the rotation weekly. This program, when started early enough a few weeks ago seems to have been doing well at containing early detected areas in a field or as a preventative treatment.

**Powdery mildew** is still active as well, and we suggest you continue with one of the following weekly: Quintec, Torino, or Procure. Note several of these materials have a maximum number of applications, Torino is limited to 2 applications per season and Procure and Quintec are limited to 3 applications per season. Growers need to rotate to avoid exceeding the label. Recently, we have seen advertisements for Prolivo (thanks Tommy Harper for this lead), a product recently labelled for watermelon that may also be considered when it becomes available (Tommy indicates it may not be available to us yet). Prolivo has performed well in recent UF cucurbit fungicide trials. It may be one for future crop seasons.

**Spider mites.** We have a few isolated spots of spider mites that have been detected and confirmed this past week. These very small pests feed on the underside of leaves and turn the leaves yellow, but brighter yellow than most other things causing yellowing. You will likely need a magnifying hand lens to confirm their presence.

**Yellow leaf syndrome.** Tatiana Sanchez, Tyler Pittman, and Mark Warren are still working with the Hochmuth brothers on this puzzle and we are making progress, but it is clearly a complex issue. Yes, we dusted off George Hochmuth from retirement to help us on this one. We have not been able to pin it down to only one clear cause. We are continuing to look hard at the potential long-term impact of the cold weather event in early April. We see definite patterns in affected fields where there is less

yellowing in areas of the field where trees or tree lines provided protection on the western sides. We also see the possibility of spray impact, but this is more elusive so far. If you have experienced this specific yellowing syndrome this season, your county extension agent will soon be in touch to fill out a questionnaire about the fields affected by the yellowing syndrome to help us identify common factors in affected fields and better understand potential causes, or you can complete the short questionnaire <https://arcg.is/1yDTf5>. Stay tuned.

**Finishing off the fertilizer and irrigation** as the harvests near completion. A few points of guidance for you. There is no need to continue fertigating within the last 7-10 days from your very final harvest. Until you get to that 7-10 day ending period, you should continue fertigating but not at the high rate. I suggest you consider about 1.5 to no more than 2.0 lbs of nitrogen and potash per acre per day rate. Cutting off the fertilizer entirely earlier than that final 7-10 days may impact fruit size and quality. But, they do not need to be pushed hard with fertilizer or water at the very end. You may also need to adjust irrigation schedules near the end as fruit load is reduced. Mark Warren reminds us to also consider your irrigation program as the predicted heavy rains come this end of week and weekend. You should consider backing down irrigation and leaving some fill capacity as the rains come. Use your soil moisture sensors to guide you.

**Squash bugs.** As I have mentioned in past notices, it really looks like we will benefit ourselves next year if we spray for these huge squash bug immature and adult populations immediately after the season ends or even earlier if the beehives are removed. Bifenthrin and other inexpensive pyrethroids have been very effective when good spray coverage is attained. We hope this reduction in population will result in much lower adult populations overwintering.