

Suwannee Valley Watermelon Crop Update- June 23, 2020  
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Hello watermelon growers and allied industry as well. This final season updates are provided to you from your UF/IFAS Extension agents in the Suwannee Valley. We want to congratulate you on completing a most unusual, but very successful, season overall. We remember back to March and early April when things looked rough from a market standpoint, but then, light at the end of the tunnel appeared and wow, who could have predicted the actual market demand and price? You all deserved a great season and we hope it was one you will remember for years to come. I know you all were able to essentially “clean out” the fields resulting in very nice total yields. I was in one field last Saturday and I could have walked that entire 40 acres and still could not have found enough watermelons to fill the back seat of my Explorer. I am serious! It brought a huge smile to my face because I knew that meant success to the farmer. You see, we (Extension agents) become attached to these fields with you over the course of the season and we indirectly feel your pains and also your glee when things go well. If you are successful, then we are thrilled with you and for you.

Here are a few thoughts as we leave this season:

We still have work to do on the **yellow leaf syndrome**, but feel it is strongly connected to the cold week in early April with temperatures in the upper 30s. Perhaps it is not entirely tied to the cold, but there is a strong connection with protected areas of affected fields where the protected areas were not hurt nearly as badly as the open areas of those same fields. There is a known disorder called “**sub-lethal chilling injury**” that seems to fit this situation. Those fields that were most affected also had very high early yields and may have contributed to the overall plant stress. We are trying to review spray application records to see if anything consistently added to the symptoms, but nothing has jumped out at us yet. Agents may be contacting you if you had affected fields to collect any information, we think may help find the complete solution or you can complete this quick form <https://arccg.is/1yDTf5>.

**Squash bugs.** Don’t walk away from fields with high populations of squash bugs. Inexpensive applications of a pyrethroid will go a long way toward cleaning up populations and reducing those overwintering adults. Bees should be removed if not already gone before spraying.

**COVID 19** ended up with a big impact this spring and we will be working with the industry to develop a better plan for the next season. I know this was a tough situation for the field workers and the farm families as well to stay safe when the workers have such a high portion of positive tests. Let us know how we can help you all before the next season.

**2020 Suwannee Valley Watermelon Institute, Thursday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>** at the Straughn Center, UF/IFAS, Gainesville, FL. Hold the Date. Let us know what educational program topics you want covered. Industry sponsor requests will be sent to industry reps soon.

**Florida Watermelon Association (FWA).** Join FWA November 4-6, 2020 in Orlando for the 2020 Florida Watermelon Convention! This is a new time of year for the annual convention, so mark your calendars.

<https://www.flfwa.com/2020-convention-schedule>

Also, if you are not currently a member (only \$50 for grower membership), you should consider joining. FWA does amazing work on behalf of the watermelon industry, including promotion, supporting research, labor issues, etc. I continue being a member, so, hope you will join too. Help your association help you. <https://www.flfwa.com/membership-1>

**Off-season UF/IFAS Extension projects.** The Extension agents from this region have begun an exciting new project to develop a publication that will feature photos of all kinds of watermelon production issues in photographs from this area. The publication will include, of course disease and insect photos, but also, lightning strikes, wildlife feeding symptoms, various chemical burns, spider mites, and a host of other photos of things we may have been called upon to troubleshoot on your farms. We want this to be something you find useful and will enjoy referring to each year. Our first planning meeting has been set for early July to get our butts to work. Stay tuned.