

Welcome to our 2023 season weekly issue of our UF/IFAS Extension Suwannee Valley Watermelon Crop Update. These updates will be summarized by Bob Hochmuth, Regional Specialized Extension Agent- Vegetable Crops, with input from Suwannee Valley Extension Agents: Mark Warren (Levy), Tyler Pittman (Gilchrist), Tatiana Sanchez (Alachua), Luke Harlow (Bradford), Jay Capasso (Columbia), Dan Fenneman (Madison), Keith Wynn (Hamilton), Emily Beach (Lafayette), Jim Devalerio (Union), De'Anthony Price (Jefferson), Bob Hochmuth (for vacant Suwannee position), Kevin Athearn (RSA- Agri- business), and Sudeep Sidhu (RSA- Water Resources).

If you know someone who wants to be added to this weekly notice, contact your Extension Agent or Mark Warren (352-949-8288) if you want to be added to the regional watermelon group text app.

We have initiated a more formal way to support our watermelon growers with a rapid diagnostics system through Suwannee Valley Regional and County Extension Agents. This industry-funded program allows Extension Agents to submit and pay for watermelon grower's plant disease and other diagnostic samples. This SV Rapid Diagnostic Watermelon Program will help us to get quicker diagnostic results, helping to give early alerts to everyone, and not have to charge the growers directly. **Sponsors of this program in 2023 to date include Harrell's, TriEst Ag, Gowan USA, and Syngenta Crop Protection.** Those reps interested in sponsoring can contact Bob Hochmuth at bobhoch@ufl.edu or 386-288-6301.

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Two watermelon field days are now planned for the Suwannee Valley region, one on Monday, April 10th at Whitehurst Cattle Company in Williston and the other on Thursday, April 20th at UF/IFAS NFREC-Suwannee Valley. See the information below for details.

Twilight On-Farm Watermelon Field Day- Controlled Release Fertilizer Project, CRF and Irrigation Management, and Grafted Watermelon Research Update

Monday, April 10th, 2023

Presented by the UF/IFAS Suwannee Valley Watermelon Extension Team

Location: Whitehurst Cattle Company, 20551 NE 75th Street, Williston, FL 32696

5:30 PM — Registration Opens

6:00 PM — Welcome

6:05 PM — **2023 Controlled Release Fertilizer Project (7 watermelon and 3 corn farms): What we have learned, linking fertilizer and irrigation management.** Bob Hochmuth, UF/IFAS

NFREC Suwannee Valley, Mark Warren, UF/IFAS Levy County Extension, and Sudeep Sidhu, UF/IFAS NFREC-SV.

Irrigation Automation. Tyler Pittman, Gilchrist County Extension.

Update on Watermelon Grafting Projects, Tatiana Sanchez, UF/IFAS Alachua County Extension.

7:00 PM — **Dinner, Sponsored by Mayo Fertilizer, Pursell Agri-Tech, and Harrell's Fertilizer**

8:00 pm - Adjourn

Twilight "At-The-Research and Education Center" Watermelon Field Day- Automation of Irrigation Systems, Paper Mulch Research Update, and Fertilizer Management Programs Thursday, April 20th, 2023

Presented by the UF/IFAS Suwannee Valley Watermelon Extension Team

Location: UF/IFAS NFREC-Suwannee Valley, 8202 CR 417, Live Oak FL 32060

5:30 PM — Registration Opens

6:00 PM — Welcome

(Note: CCA and Pesticide Applicator CEUs have been applied for)

6:05 PM — **Presentations and Field Tour of Research Trials.**

Automating Irrigation Systems in Vegetable Crops. Andy Voelz, Anthony Tasselli, Michael Steele, ToroAg; and Marshall Hall, Josh Freeman, TriEst Ag.

Cost Share Opportunities for Automating Irrigation Systems, Jonathan Crain, Suwannee River Water Management District.

Paper Mulch in Watermelon Production A Research Update, Fritz Paulsen, WestRock.

Florida Watermelon Association- funded Fertilizer Trial (including comparison of Traditional, Controlled Release Fertilizers, and All-liquid season-long program). Bob Hochmuth and Sydney Williams, UF/IFAS NFREC Suwannee Valley.

Insect and Disease Update. Jay Capasso Columbia County Extension and Bob Hochmuth.

7:00 PM — **Sponsored Dinner- ToroAg (Irrigation Automation, Supplies), WestRock (Paper Mulch) Comments from Florida Watermelon Association (FWA),** Laura Land, FWA Research Committee Chair.

8:00 pm - Adjourn

Weekly Insect Update

Squash bugs (See pages 100-101 in your IFAS Watermelon Field Guide): The last week or two squash bugs were observed for the first time this season in several counties throughout the region. Most were still individual adults as opposed to mating pairs which tells us that the bugs are just now migrating from wooded areas outside the field perimeters. Although some mating pairs of squash bugs have been seen too (thanks De Broughton). We encourage everyone to scout and detect them early. It is better to spray the borders earlier as they migrate in as opposed to having to spray the entire field potentially killing many beneficials as the pyrethroids recommended for use on squash bugs are hard on pollinators. (R. Hochmuth)

Thrips were out in full force across the region last week. These tiny yellowish/orange bullet shaped insects scratch on the surface of watermelon leaves and cause scarring (see photo below). Thrips can also feed in the blooms of watermelon. However, these insects rarely cause enough damage in watermelons to spray. These insects will also scratch on your skin and cause a mild itch as if you were being bitten by “no see-ums”. I mainly want everyone to be able to identify the damage of thrips feeding. (R. Hochmuth)

