

Welcome to our final 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.**

Season winding down for most:

Congratulations! This will be a very memorable season in many ways, but the high market prices throughout will be the part that will be most memorable. It may have been a once in a generation type of year in that regard. A 30 cents/lb. market for essentially the entire season for this Suwannee Valley region is simply unheard of. In late May, I would have said yields were going to be okay, but nothing special. Then the harvests just kept going, pushing yields to a higher than what we expected simply because we harvested fields 4-6 or more times. So, overall, a very good year and a very memorable one.

Two quick take aways from a disease standpoint. Fusarium wilt is still a huge concern and powdery mildew seems to be getting stronger every year and more difficult to control, even with a very rigorous spray program targeted at powdery mildew.

I realize there are still several later planted fields that are only in the 2nd harvest or so. In those fields, continue to be diligent in managing downy mildew and powdery mildew until you see the last week of the harvest season. The same can be said for fertigations; continue at a level of about 1.5 lbs/A/day until one week or so from final harvest.

Field clean-up reminders:

- Once a field is completely done, get it cleaned up as soon as possible and disc/till the field to bury the crop debris.
- Remember to remove soil moisture sensors and properly store them.
- Manage your finances wisely. As you know next year can just as easily be a tough financial gamble.

Controlled Release Fertilizer Project:

As most of you know, we have been working with 7 watermelon farms and 3 corn farms in the region (Alachua, Gilchrist, and Levy County) this year. The funding support came from FDACS Office of Ag Water Policy and the Suwannee River Water Management District. The demonstration fields are set up with half being fertilized in the grower's traditional manner and the other half using controlled release fertilizer. We have been able to collect yield data in each field at every harvest and will have a tremendous data set when all harvests are done. Each field was harvested at least 4 times and some as many as 6-7 times. I want to thank the cooperating farmers for their commitment to this project and notifying us when harvests were planned. So far, that total is over 30 harvests and many of them taking more than one day. For those who helped track the harvest data, thank you! To my County Extension colleagues, Mark Warren, Beth Cannon, Tatiana Sanchez-Jones, and Tyler Pittman; and my NFREC-SV crew, Sydney Williams, Kaleb Kelley, Avery Kelley and Mike Tucker, THANKS to everyone for always being there, even at the last minute, even on a Saturday or Sunday! Thanks also to the fertilizer manufacturers and distributors for providing the controlled release fertilizers in this project, including Harrell's, Pursell, and Mayo Fertilizer. It took a team to pull off this project successfully. We have seen a lot and learned a lot and we will be compiling the data over the next few weeks and will have a nice summary of the project later this summer. One thing for sure, we have demonstrated that very high yields can be attained by both conventional and controlled release fertilizer programs! Stay tuned for more!

Final Season Thank You!

I want to thank all of the contacts who have helped me with information sharing each week so I could summarize and send out the most up to date information possible. Many of these contacts were inside UF/IFAS including all County Extension Agents in the Suwannee Valley and our State Extension specialists. You all are simply the best! One final thanks to our weekly update industry sponsors, Harrell's Syngenta, Triest Ag, and Gowan USA who provided the funds to cover the dozens of disease sample diagnoses. Furthermore, I want to thank a few key industry members who kept the flow of information going in both directions, to me, and from me to growers. This is all so crucial to give our growers the best information possible. Not everyone equally sees the benefit of two-way information sharing, but the following people embrace it and specialize in that sharing of information, ultimately to benefit the growers whether they are clients or not. Those folks who consistently let me know what they are seeing in the field and gave me sound input include: De Broughton, 6 Gen Ag Services; Anthony Drew, Old Town Ag; Steve Hoak, Ag Consulting Solutions; and Kendra McCorkle, Syngenta Agronomic Service Rep. Thanks to all you who are part of this large team, internal and external to UF/IFAS, for making these weekly updates the best they can be!

Congratulations to all for a very successful Suwannee Valley watermelon season.

Sincerely,

Bob Hochmuth, UF/IFAS Regional Extension Agent- Vegetable Crops, NFREC- Suwannee Valley