

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.**

Disease and Insect updates:

- Downy mildew pressure is reported throughout the region and growers should continue sprays until one-week to final harvest. For downy, choose either Ranman or Orondis Ultra (in rotation with each other). This is the main "must include" in your program recommendation. Downy is the one disease we can't take a risk on, so keep up with these options in your spray tank right now, especially younger fields.
- Powdery mildew is pretty aggressive right now and reports of increasing infections in fields where powdery mildew sprays have not been implemented well. We still recommend Quintec and Procure, but Quintec is limited to 4 applications per crop, and Procure is limited to 3 applications per crop. Another option that has done well in UF/IFAS trials at Immokalee is Rhyme. However, Rhyme has a caution statement on the label for potential to be phytotoxic (burn) in watermelons., so night or very late evening spraying with Rhyme may be necessary. As you approach the end of the harvesting period, these spray materials can be dropped.
- For gummy stem blight management, a broad-spectrum fungicide like Manzate should still be added to the tank mix if harvest is not 5 days or less. Another good option is Aprovia Top which has a 0-day preharvest interval, whereas Inspire Super has a 7-day preharvest interval. Many growers who have already made 2 or more applications in early crops could consider eliminating these two if gummy stem blight is not prevalent.
- Rindworm (usually several worm species including, corn earworm, fall armyworm and beet armyworm, etc.) damage has been very light to this point, but we have noticed a large hatch of eggs and small worms in the past 2 weeks. We expect increased rindworm feeding, therefore, continue to scout for damage and spray weekly. Intrepid and Coragen as sprays are still good choices. Early planted fields that have been harvested 3 or more times may not need continued rindworm sprays, if the fruit is not being fed on and if only a week or so is left in the harvest period.

- Spider mites are continuing to be detected in some fields in small patches. Be on the lookout for mite damage which will appear as yellow/golden leaves and drying of leaves as well. This usually starts on field perimeters and may need spraying with a miticide, if several weeks remain in the harvest season.
(Bob Hochmuth).