

Welcome to this week's issue of our 2024 season 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), Dan Fenneman (Madison), Keith Wynn (Hamilton), Emily Beach (Lafayette), Jim Devalerio (Union), De'Anthony Price (Jefferson), Raymond Balaguer (Suwannee), Kevin Athearn (RSA-Agri- business), Shivendra Kumar (RSA-Agronomic Crops), Jay Capasso (RSA- Water Resources), and Bob H. covering vacant Columbia County position.

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. Plant disease samples are typically \$40 and leaf tissue analyses are typically \$20. We are currently extending our solicitation of those industry reps interested in sponsoring this effort. The past year's sponsorships have ranged from \$200 to \$2,000 per company. Sponsors will be recognized every week beginning this week. Those interested in being added as a sponsor can contact Bob Hochmuth at bobhoch@ufl.edu or 386-288-6301.

Current 2024 sponsors of our Watermelon Rapid Diagnostics Program include Valdosta Plant Company, Mayo Ag Services, Gowan USA, Harrell's Fertilizer, Triest Ag, Syngenta Crop Protection, WestRock Paper Company, Orbia Netafim, and Super Sweet Farms. Others are still welcome to join.

Topics this week include: Disease Update, Fertigation Autopilot After Harvests Start.

Disease Update:

This past has continued more of the same. That is plenty of disease pressure and from several pathogens. As mentioned last week, we continue to see cases of Alternaria leaf spot, Anthracnose, Bacterial Leaf Spot, Downy Mildew, Gummy Stem Blight, and Powdery Mildew. But as I visited fields last week, some fields were still relatively clean, so it is not high pressure of many diseases in all fields. Interestingly last week brought higher pressure from gummy stem blight and this was confirmed not only from Extension agent observations, but also from the UF Plant Disease Diagnostic lab on campus. Powdery mildew also seemed to be in an upswing last week. The new confirmations we saw last week were in the virus category. Specifically, we have confirmation from one of the potyviruses and the exact ID is being determined (Carrie Harmon). The potyvirus group, which includes common viruses like watermelon mosaic virus and zucchini yellow mosaic virus, include viruses that are typically transmitted by aphids. More to come in the future.

I continue to suggest you focus first on the disease that can move throughout the region and your fields most quickly, and that disease is downy mildew. I feel like it will be necessary to use either Orondis Ultra or Ranman for downy mildew in your weekly rotation with other fungicides. It is also important to note, overhead irrigation greatly increases the risk of downy. Final thought is to know what is in “your” fields and react accordingly but prepare for downy mildew. Combinations for downy (Orondis Ultra or Ranman), gummy (Inspire Super (7 day PHI) or Aprovia Top (0 day PHI)) and powdery (Quintec, Rhyme, Procure) are expensive mixes, so be sure you know which diseases present the greatest challenge in your situation. Also, continue to keep up with your rindworm preventative programs as well. Georgia is reporting they will be later than normal in June before they have much movement of watermelon loads. This may be a factor in considering how long we may be able to harvest, so keep that in mind. (R. Hochmuth)

Fertigation Autopilot After Harvests Start:

I had noted last week we are winding up petiole sap testing. Historically, I have found most fields can be carried with nitrogen and potash applications at a rate of about 1.5, and no more than 2.0 lbs per acre per day. When you get to 7-10 days from the very final harvest, you should stop fertigations all together as they will not be needed that close to the final harvest. (R. Hochmuth)