

Welcome to 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-Jones (Alachua), Luke Harlow (Bradford), Dan Fenneman (Madison), Keith Wynn (Hamilton), Emily Beach (Lafayette), Jim Devalerio (Union), Ben Hoffner (Jefferson), Raymond Balaguer (Suwannee), Derick Conover (Columbia) Kevin Athearn (RSA-Agri- business), Shivendra Kumar (RSA-Agronomic Crops), and Jay Capasso (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 will continue this year 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 soliciting 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 2025 sponsors of our Watermelon Rapid Diagnostics Program include: Mayo Ag Services, Gowan USA, Smurfit/WestRock Paper Mulch, Orbia Netafim, Syngenta Crop Protection, Harrell's Fertilizer, TriEst Ag, and Triangle Chemical Company. Others are still welcome to join.

Observations from last week:

The watermelon crop has grown significantly in the past two weeks with daytime temperatures well into the 80s or even low 90s. We have begun to set fruit on the earliest planted crop, so it is time to begin to think about any sprays and how to protect the pollinating bees. We continue to get reports of wilting of individual vines or entire plants because of early-season appearance of Fusarium wilt (see last week's report). Other than Fusarium, we simply have not seen any other disease issues. Therefore, I still suggest staying with chlorothalonil or mancozeb as your cover sprays. Remember overuse of the narrow target fungicides too early really makes it difficult to develop a proper rotation later in the season when you really need those specific fungicides. Bob Hochmuth)

Two Watermelon Field Days set for the Suwannee Valley- Hold the Dates (more registration info next week):

1. Watermelon On Farm/ NFREC-SV Field Day, Monday, **May 5, 2025**, starting at 3:30 PM at a farm of Adrian Land's near Obrien; then moving to the NFREC- Suwannee Valley to see the research plots there and enjoy dinner and fellowship.

2. Union County Watermelon Field Day Co-planned by BASF and UF/IFAS Extension at Dukes Family Farm, near Lake Butler. This will be a morning field day starting at 9 am on Wednesday, **June 11, 2025**.

Early season petiole sap testing:

We have begun petiole sap testing in a few fields and have observed a pattern in these fields. The pattern is the potassium levels are consistently in the optimum range and the nitrogen is consistently high, above the target range, regardless of bed fertilizer programs. Some nitrogen levels are very high, so we highly suggest getting on the sap testing schedule with your Extension agent as this may be an excellent time to conserve on fertigations. But, as I say, let's have the science of tissue testing guide us. No guessing, no routine! (Tatiana Sanchez-Jones and Bob Hochmuth)

Squash bug reports:

During this past week or so, we have received a few reports of squash bugs arriving in the fields around the perimeter of the fields (See pages 100-101 in your IFAS Watermelon Field Guide). 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 into the fields. 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. Nighttime spraying will be preferred. (R. Hochmuth)

2025 Suwannee Valley CARES:


The Farm Bureau's signature environmental stewardship recognition program, Suwannee Valley CARES, is set for Thursday, May 1, 2025, at NFREC-Suwannee Valley. The Florida Watermelon Association will be there along with the 2025 Florida Watermelon Queen, Reagan Hudson. Come get some fresh Florida watermelon and all types of other ag commodities for dinner that evening. (Bob Hochmuth, Kelly Aue)

**UF/IFAS NFREC
SUWANNEE VALLEY**
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- **SAMPLE FLORIDA PRODUCTS**
- **LIVE ENTERTAINMENT**
- **DOOR PRIZES**

The 24th Annual Suwannee CARES Celebration will honor local farm families who protect our environment throughout the Suwannee and Santa Fe River Basins. Join us on Thursday, May 1 beginning at 6:00 PM!

YOU'RE INVITED!



RSVP your party using the QR code or at [Eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) under 2025 CARES Dinner



www.ThisFarmCARES.org