

Welcome to our final UF/IFAS Extension Suwannee Valley Watermelon Crop Update. These updates are 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).

Thanks to the 2025 sponsors of our Watermelon Rapid Diagnostics Program including: Mayo Ag Services, Gowan USA, Smurfit/WestRock Paper Mulch, Orbia Netafim, Syngenta Crop Protection, Harrell's Fertilizer, TriEst Ag, and Triangle Chemical Company.

2025 Season wrap up:

As we bring closure to the 2025 season, all of us in UF/IFAS Extension want to provide a short final summary of this season. Those of us in Extension are in a service and educational role to help the entire watermelon industry with a focus on the success of the growers. We admire everyone's hard work, willingness to take risks, and grow a super crop. When we look back on this season the thoughts that immediately come to mind include the cold nights early in the season, unrelenting sandstorms, downy mildew and a challenging market after Memorial Day. Yields and quality were both generally very good, so we hope and pray every farm comes through the season successfully.

Here are a few collective thoughts from us Extension Agents in the Suwannee Valley Watermelon team who love serving your educational needs:

- We admire your commitment to embrace BMP and IPM strategies and adopting new technologies as you move forward.
- You have kept us in the loop when you suspected a new disease or other problem emerged in your fields.
- We submitted dozens of plant disease samples as part of our Rapid Diagnostics Program and this information was shared weekly to let everyone know what was happening in the region and how to respond. I honestly feel like this program saves everyone a tremendous amount of money by staying ahead of diseases and insects. Thanks to our industry sponsors of this program and the consultants who engage with us, also helping everyone in the region.
- The most impactful disease overall was downy mildew. Both gummy stem blight and powdery mildew were less of an issue in 2025. Early-season bacterial leaf spot disease incidence was also much lower than in recent years.
- Extension agents, crop consultants, industry field reps and others made countless farm visits, all with the objective of helping farmers increase the likelihood of success.
- We still had unusual incidences of lightning strikes, spider mites, chimera vines, and odd weeds like dodder.
- Serious concerns with Fusarium wilt and nutsedge continue to be very challenging.
- A weekly update has been shared every week in March through this update in mid-June.

- We held two field days, thanks Adrian Land and Mike Dukes for hosting those events on your farms.
- Pesticide applicators CEUs, Certified Crop Advisor CEUs, and Food safety training certificates were all provided during the season at various events.
- There were 5 farms collaborating with the Controlled Release Fertilizer (CRF) pilot cost share program funded by FDACS and SRWMD.
- There were six farms testing the Smurfit/WestRock paper mulch on a commercial scale.
- Nearly 1,000 acres of watermelon in this region were grown using grafted watermelon transplants, primarily used as a measure of control of powdery mildew.
- Automation of drip irrigation systems continued to be adopted on a few thousand acres now.
- Petiole-sap testing was conducted on about 100 farms weekly during the middle weeks of the cropping season to help refine N and K fertigations.
- Soil moisture sensors have become a critical part of our BMP successes. These are very valuable tools, and I believe we need to even further improve how we are using these sensors for decision making.
- Four UF/IFAS research posters were produced and presented at various conferences.
- Hopefully the Florida Watermelon Association picked up a few new members. FWA Watermelon Queens were very active with several events throughout the season.