

The Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources¹

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The Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources (WLIANR) develops and refines the leadership capabilities of leaders involved in Florida agriculture and natural resources. These leaders are prepared to become increasingly involved in forming policies that affect the future of Florida agriculture and natural resources in a direct or indirect manner. In 1989, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) saw the need for such a program and began the process of implementing the Florida Leadership Program for Agriculture and Natural Resources. The program later became the WLIANR after reaching an endowment goal, which was completely funded through private sector Florida agriculture and natural resources.

The WLIANR, along with approximately 30 other programs like it within the United States, was developed for farmers and people employed in occupations related to agriculture. The programs were developed because the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, which was created in 1930 to focus on building the capacity of people, communities, and institutions, found that these individuals had the technical knowledge but often lacked the background in the social sciences and humanities to deal with issues related to the agriculture and natural resource industries effectively (Howell, Weir, & Cook, 1982).

The objectives of the WLIANR are as follows:

- To prepare potential leaders to assume greater leadership responsibilities in their organizations, industries, and communities.
- To assemble individual networks composed of class members, alumni, and program resources for the purpose of developing future industry, organizational, civic, and political leaders.
- To create strategic alliances and build strong linkages within and across Florida's agriculture and natural resources sectors.
- To analyze complex issues facing individuals interested in areas related to agriculture, natural resources, and Florida's communities.
- To apply inner-personal skills so as to develop a better understanding of people —themselves, fellow citizens, and their environments as to more effectively work with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- To create an understanding of social, economic, and political systems in which people function and how to work within these systems to effectively bring about change.

The target audience for this program includes individuals who have shown leadership potential and aspire for greater

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leadership responsibilities in the private and/or public sectors at the community, state, national, or international levels in Florida agriculture and natural resources. The selection process for participants includes three phases: nomination, application, and interview. From this process, up to 30 individuals are chosen to participate in a class of the program, with each class lasting approximately 2 years. These individuals have generally demonstrated the willingness and capacity for long-term leadership. Each class consists of men and women from the private sector, 25–45 years of age, who make a substantial percentage of their income from occupations in Florida agriculture, natural resources, or related areas, and who are committed to providing effective leadership well into the future.

After the selection process, the participants attend 11 study/travel seminars involving about 55 days during a 22-month period. The first year of the program focuses on local and state agriculture and natural resource issues. The second year focuses on national and international issues. The seminars are scheduled on alternating months. These seminars include nine 3–5-day seminars held in locations throughout Florida, one 10–12 day seminar in Washington, DC, and another state, and one 15–18 day international seminar in developed and developing countries.

The seminars consist of lectures, guest speakers, tours, and on-site visits. Government and private business leaders, state and federal agency personnel, and university faculty and staff conduct the seminars. The seminars focus on training to emphasize the understanding of current issues, as well as basic skills in communication, interpersonal relations, decision making, and problem solving. Each seminar incorporates the program's objectives.

Alumni members have assumed various leadership roles at the local, county, state, and national levels with government, commodity group organizations, and others. Additionally, there is an ongoing and active alumni association that holds an annual meeting each summer, as well as yearly regional meetings. These meetings include both social and professional aspects to help further leadership development and create networks of leaders in the state of Florida.

The future of Florida agriculture and natural resources is dependent on individuals who have the necessary skills and experience to effectively participate in decisions that impact organizations, industries, and communities. The WLIANR is providing the leadership development necessary to ensure that the Florida agriculture and natural resource industries remain viable and successful now and in the future.

References

Howell, R. E., Weir, I. L., & Cook, A. K. (1982). *Development of rural leadership: Problems, procedures, and insights*. Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation.