Exploring Careers in Agriculture through Green & Growing Youth Field Day

Martha Glenn*, Crystal Snodgrass1, Diana Smith1, Nathan Boyd2, Zhanao Deng2, Hugh Smith2, Vance M. Whitaker2, Jozer Mangandi2, and Gary Vallad2

1University of Florida/IFAS Manatee County Extension, 1303 17th Street West, Palmetto, FL 34221
2University of Florida/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, 14625 CR 672, Wimauma, FL 33598

Manatee County has over 313,000 acres of production agriculture and ranks 7th in Florida for agricultural sales. However an aging workforce threatens the future viability of these enterprises. Therefore it is vital to inspire our youth to consider careers in agriculture. The objectives of this program were to provide the opportunities for youth to experience science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs while exposing them to different facets of agriculture and encouraging them to consider careers in agriculture.

First the participants toured a local potato farm and a tree farm (Fig. 1), where they learned about all aspects of production and were given the opportunity to harvest their own potatoes and tag a tree for sale. At the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center (GCREC), several researchers talked to the youth about their projects including plant breeding, entomology, disease resistant crops, breeding for specific scents for strawberries, and weed control (Figs 2–4). The youth also toured current field trails and research labs, picking strawberries and viewing insects and diseases under microscopes. After lunch, the youth viewed a presentation about farm/nursery safety, performed hands-on activities, and played educational games. Fifty-eight youth from diverse backgrounds participated in the youth field days.

At the end of the field day a written survey was used to evaluate the program. A six month follow up survey was also utilized to measure behavior change among the participants. There was a 39% increase in knowledge about agricultural science, a 36% increase in knowledge pertaining to the nursery and farm business, and a 28% increase in interest in pursuing a career in agriculture. Eighty percent (80%) of the youth felt that buying food locally was a good idea and had convinced their parents to do so and 60% said that they realized that some insects are beneficial and tried to preserve them in their homes and gardens. This ongoing program continues to inform the youth of Manatee County about diverse careers in agriculture and emphasize the role of science, technology, engineering, and math.

*Corresponding author: mglenn7@ufl.edu