



Increasing Adoption of Water-saving Technologies on Farms

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As an effort to improve water use efficiency in Alachua County's horticultural crops, the agent started an on-farm program in 2018 to demonstrate the use and benefits of installing soil moisture sensors (SMS). The goals were to increase awareness of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and adoption of water-saving technologies and practices to improve water use in farms. Resources to conduct the demos using All-in-one Sentek Soil Moisture Probes were acquired from the University of Florida/IFAS Minigrant program and the Northwest Florida Research and Education Center-Suwannee Valley.

The probes were rotated on six farms with a variety of vegetable and fruit crops. The agent worked with each grower during the demonstration period to improve irrigation and nutrient management. Two farms were selected to host a field day to display the use of the sensors, and to inform participants about cost-share programs available through multiple sources. Forty-two people attended the field days. Exit surveys for each field day indicated that participants intend to adopt SMS (16% n=26 and 57% n=16), use irrigation scheduling (50%, n = 16) and, self-evaluate water use (50% n = 26, 57% n = 16).

Knowledge gain for these events ranged from 18% to 36%. Three of the six farmers applied for a cost-share program to acquire the sensors. For the remaining three growers, two were indifferent and one disagreed with the adoption of SMS on small, diversified farms. Three farmers adjusted their irrigation practices while using the sensors although all six farmers self-reported water savings. Additional efforts are needed to educate farmers on tools and programs available for water conservation in horticulture.

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