



## 2011 Vegetable and Small Fruit Nutrition Management Workshop

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Fruit and vegetable nutrition is crucial to produce a profitable crop. Under the umbrella of nutrition, fertilizer and irrigation go hand in hand. It is the growers' responsibility to ensure their use of water and fertilizer is responsible while still gaining an economic advantage. Most growers in the Southwest Florida area utilize Best Management Practices (BMPs) in order to achieve this goal. In response to grower and county extension agent requests for educational training in the areas of fruit and vegetable nutrition, a group of agents and a specialist located in Manatee and Hillsborough counties created a program to meet these needs.

The objectives of this program were to provide training to fruit and vegetable growers on the nutritional requirements of popular crops and the latest techniques in fertilizer and irrigation application to meet these requirements. Additionally, the goal was to engage extension agents by providing an approved in-service-training, strengthening their knowledge base, thus providing better service to their respective clientele. Classroom style presentations were delivered (Fig. 1) that provided in-depth information on nutritional requirements of several key crops. These crops included: blueberry, strawberry, tomato, peppers, and cucurbits. The first talk was a general presentation on fertilization to make sure attendees had the basic knowledge needed to understand and learn from the successive presentations. The program also included presentations on important cultural practices related to crop nutrition, such as cover crop utilization and green manures.

In order to provide meals and pay travel expenses for agents and specialists, vendors were invited to sponsor the event in exchange for a booth to display their products. Participants were provided with PowerPoint presentations as well as other educational materials, including EDIS publications and copies of the 2011–2012 Vegetable Production Handbook for Florida.

Approximately 86 participants, including large and small growers, extension agents, specialists, and industry representatives, attended the program. Eleven Extension agents registered for the course as in-service training. The program provided an interface for vendors and growers, potentially allowing growers to improve applications techniques. Eight vendors sponsored the workshop, which provided the meal and covered travel expenses

for attendees. A follow-up survey was conducted, showing an overall increase in knowledge of 17%.

Due to positive feedback from program attendees, coordinators plan to provide this program annually, adjusting the program focus as new research data and technologies are developed. The advantages of adopting this program in another county include:

- increased grower knowledge and potential behavior changes that are conducive to BMPs;
- improved knowledge base of extension agents who are then able to provide pertinent information to growers statewide;
- provide an interface for vendors and growers to meet and improve irrigation and fertilization techniques.

The disadvantages of adopting this program would be the difficulty recruiting vendors and an extended travel distance for speakers and agents.



Fig. 1. Participants in the 2011 Vegetable and Small Fruit Nutrition Management Workshop.

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