



Capitalizing on Resources of the Small Farms Academy

CAROLYN SAFT*¹, TERRY DELVALLE², JIM DEVALERIO³, DAN FENNEMAN⁴,
BOB HOCHMUTH⁵, ALICIA LAMBORN⁶, NICHELLE DEMOREST⁷, AND WENDY WILBER⁸

¹University of Florida, IFAS, Suwannee County Extension, Live Oak, FL 32064

²University of Florida, IFAS, Duval County Extension, Jacksonville, FL 32254

³University of Florida, IFAS, Bradford County Extension, Starke, FL 32091

⁴University of Florida, IFAS, Madison County Extension, Madison, FL 32340

⁵Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center, Live Oak, FL 32060

⁶University of Florida, IFAS, Baker County Extension, Macclenny, FL 32063

⁷University of Florida, IFAS, Columbia County Extension, Lake City, FL 32025

⁸University of Florida, IFAS, Alachua County Extension, Gainesville, FL 32609

Resources for demonstrations and interactive learning activities are integral in reaching a higher level of learning and practice adoption by our clientele. The Small Farms Academy specializes in interactive learning opportunities for small farmers. Reduced funding has limited the ability of some agents to provide in-depth training opportunities and shrinking household budgets have limited the agents' ability to charge a program fee. With that in mind, the NE District Green Team has capitalized on the academy resources and extends their use for district-wide Master Gardeners and homeowner trainings (Fig. 1).

Lack of knowledge about all aspects of a topic can prohibit some workshops from being given at the county level. Experiential learning is the focus of trainings offered at the Suwannee Valley Agricultural Extension Center (SVAEC). Workshops with demonstrations and hands on activities include: pruning the orchard, hydroponics, and integrated pest management (IPM). The curriculum for these courses includes PowerPoint presentations, demonstrations, pruning, tool selection, tool sharpening, building floating gardens, scouting and insect identification activities. Additionally, publications and notebooks are distributed for future reference.

Pruning workshops reached an additional 150 people over the last three years and hydroponic resources were extended to over 200 Master Gardeners and homeowners over the last two years. The hydroponic demonstrations were also taken to the Suwannee Valley Fair where an additional 2,000 people were exposed to hydroponic gardening. The IPM workshop was limited to 75 people each year. Evaluations indicate 98% of people attending pruning workshops have implemented IFAS recommendations for pruning practices and 96% are using IPM practices. Several hydroponic workshop attendees have expanded their hydroponic systems beyond the starter floating garden obtained at the workshop. Furthermore, clientele have reported an increase in fresh vegetable consumption, which leads to a healthier diet. Attendees have also indicated they have extended the season of vegetable production through the use of hydroponics. Clientele reported

this is a preferred method of education and look for similar type workshops to attend in the future. Additional impacts include a team approach to program planning and an opportunity to reach a higher level of programming. Master Gardeners have increased opportunities to socialize and network with other Master Gardeners from the district and have brought back new ideas to their counties.

There are many advantages including multiple uses of resources so that the value is extended across a wide range of clientele. There are also increased opportunities for agents to gain advanced training and become regional experts in specific areas. We have many repeat clients so a strong support base is being developed. Workload is distributed among SVAEC staff and agents. A unified presentation is being taught district wide for a more unified message. There is an opportunity to learn new teaching techniques from other agents. Supplies are easily purchased and distributed by the Small Farms Academy coordinator. One disadvantage is that it takes more planning and communication for district-wide events. Another disadvantage is travel time and distances are increased for some attendees and agents.



Fig. 1. Master Gardener volunteers are being trained utilizing the resources of the Florida Small Farms Academy.

*Corresponding author; email: csaft@ufl.edu