



Environmental Horticulture Container Growers Learn Irrigation Practices through Extension BMP Education

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A team of state and county University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension faculty with expertise in irrigation water quality and conservation was formed to assist environmental horticulture container nursery growers with irrigation practices. Conservation and protection of Florida's water resources are vital to the future of container nursery and greenhouse production. Container plants are grown in small volumes of soilless substrates in which the water is usually replenished daily. Consequently, large amounts of water are frequently applied, often with low application efficiency. The objective of this team was to transfer information and technology about water conservation and water quality impacts on plant production to producers. The Water Team worked with educational partners such as Water Management Districts, county agencies, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Mobile Irrigation Lab, South Dade Soil & Water Conservation District Mobile Irrigation Lab, UF/IFAS Best Management Practices (BMP) Implementation Team and Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association (FNGLA) members. The Water Team has conducted educational programs (Fig. 1) in central and south Florida since 2012 with 92 attendees. Participants received classroom instruction and applied their knowledge in the field with hands-on exercises such as irrigation uniformity measurement. Surveys and pre- and post-evaluations were used to assess knowledge gain and practice changes. Participants reported that their knowledge increased from 24%–71%



Fig. 1. Growers learn about Nursery Best Management Practices from Extension specialists.

across educational programs. Six-month follow-up survey respondents from one regional program reported eight out of twelve (67%) changing production practices with the knowledge they gained at the workshop. Six out of ten (60%) increased production or saved money as a result of attending the UF/IFAS Extension Irrigation BMP Workshop.

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