UF/IFAS Treasure Coast Green Industries Working Group—Meeting the Educational Needs of the Green Industry

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The care and maintenance of landscaped green spaces along the Treasure Coast is a multi-million dollar industry with hundreds of businesses and thousands of employees. This includes, but is not limited to, architects, designers, growers, installers, irrigation specialists, maintenance professionals and pesticide and fertilizer applicators. Many of these professionals need specific licenses in order to perform their job duties legally and correctly, or hold licenses that require annual training for continuing educational units (CEUs). The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension is the appropriate organization to offer such training, but in recent years, it has become exceedingly difficult for one county to offer all of the necessary instruction to meet the needs of this clientele. The objective of the working group was to form a regional team of extension educators that would offer various outreach programs to the landscaping industry in order to meet their needs for education, certification, licensing and CEUs. This team included extension agents from Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin and Okeechobee counties. Three main teaching components are offered via the Treasure Coast Green Industries Working Group (TCGIWG): the Green Industry Best Management Practices (GI-BMP) training and certification, Limited Commercial Landscape Maintenance (LCLM) pesticide license training and other classes that offered CEU’s in various categories for the Chapters 482 and 487 licenses. Each of the four counties provided various trainings on a rotational basis with all agents participating as instructors and the host county being responsible for organization and execution. This enabled the working group to offer more classes to clientele without increasing the workload on individual agents. Traditional classroom-style setting was the norm for the majority of the trainings with lectures, videos, hands-on activities and in-class worksheets to emphasis particular objectives. Since its inception, almost 1000 people have been trained in the GI-BMP program within the TCGIWG area with an average pass rate of 96%. In 2013 alone, 45 participants attended LCLM pesticide training with an unspecified number attending other classes just for CEU’s. Participant evaluations were very positive with regard to tag-team training and the different teaching styles offered when using a variety of speakers. Given the close geographical location between the four counties (30–75 minutes between any two offices) there is a definite advantage for the agents delivering green industry programs to work together as a team. Care must be taken though to have planning meetings where training dates and locations are selected and specific tasks are assigned so that each training activity is executed in a manner that is beneficial to the green industry participant.