The Agricultural BMP (Best Management Practices) Implementation Program is up and growing in west central Florida. Jemy Hinton was named the University of Florida’s Suncoast BMP Team Leader in August and is excited about marketing this voluntary program to area growers. Jemy’s previous employment was as Agricultural Liaison with the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) SW District for 10 years. Jemy now has one eye on the environment and the other on educational programs to meet the intent of regulations with minimal impact on growers.

The BMP Implementation Program is unique according to Jemy, in the number and diversity of agencies working together to solve water quality problems. In addition to the University of Florida, which is the educational component, there is the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services whose directive is to assure the state’s agriculture is meeting DEP’s Total Maximum Daily Loading TMDL water quality goals. If growers voluntarily enroll into the BMP program, they receive an assumption of compliance and may qualify for financial incentives to assist in making management improvements.

Many nurseries are accepting this invitation and have already signed the Notice of Intent to Implement BMPs. Several of these have applied to receive associated cost-share funding. With FARMS, Mini-FARMS and Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District funding available to assist farmers in developing environmentally friendly but expensive production methods, nursery owners are eager to participate.

The most important component of the BMP Implementation Program is the presumption of compliance with state water quality standards provided to participating growers by the Florida Watershed Restoration Act. This key element meets the environmental goals while reducing grower costs, allowing them to spent more time and money doing what they do best, producing food, fiber and aesthetic beauty for the rest of the world to enjoy.

Jemy can be contacted at jwh@ifas.ufl.edu.