Vegetarian Newsletter

A Horticultural Sciences Department Extension Publication on Vegetable Crops

Eat your Veggies!!!!!

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Suncoast Vegetable Best Management Practices (BMP) Implementation

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West Central Florida Agriculture has long recognized that it is not enough just to produce a major portion of the nation’s food at times the rest of the nation is under snow. Agricultural producers also realize that it is their responsibility to be stewards of the resources they need to feed those people.

Therefore, it should not be surprising to know that growers are stepping up to the BMP plate in a big way. In the first year of the Suncoast BMP Program, vegetables and row crop growers representing almost 37,000 acres of vegetable, strawberry and other agronomic farms in 7 area counties have signed the Notice of Intent to Implement Water Quality and Quantity Best Management Practices. The Notice of Intent provides a checklist that is customized for each grower to identify those Best Management Practices currently used by the grower and encouraging growers to adopt practicable practices. These farms are doing what it takes to insure that future generations inherit adequate resources and a clean environment.

To achieve this status, Suncoast farmers have implemented practices such as drip irrigation, plasticulture and tailwater recovery. These practices lower water usage, and improve fertilizer and pesticide usage significantly. When combined with other practices such as field borders and filter strips, off-site pollutant discharges drop dramatically.

Until recently, growers had little documented evidence of how effective their BMP’s were in protecting the environment. Then research conducted by Dr. Craig Stanley on practices of area strawberry farms found that “The results reflect minimal N leaching below the root zone indicating good irrigation and plant nutrition practices” (2005). Growers have learned that in addition to being environment-friendly these practices also result in major cost savings to the farm.

Two examples of vegetable BMPs:
The wetland is a bird and wildlife paradise and the tailwater recovery system saves thousands of gallons of groundwater pumpage annually.

A West Central Florida Strawberry/vegetable operation installed a man-made scrubber wetland along with a tailwater recovery system to treat and reuse discharge and stormwater from fields on a former dairy.
These are just a few of the hundreds of practices growers use to assure environmental agencies that farms are in compliance with environmental regulations.

Farmers needing financial assistance to implement BMPs may apply to SWFWMD (Southwest Florida Water Management District) for FARMS (Facilitating Agricultural Resource Management Systems) funding. (The farm must provide an off-set to groundwater pumpage to qualify.) Eligible BMPs include, but are not limited to, internal surface water control, tailwater recovery, alternative source utilization, and improved irrigation management decision support tools.

Another source of assistance is the Natural Resources Conservation Service EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program). The application deadline for this funding is November 16, 2007. Growers may contact their county NRCS office for information and applications.

Growers who wish to receive BMP instructional manuals and for information on the Suncoast Vegetable and Agronomic Crop BMP Implementation Program, please contact:

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- Or contact your local UF Cooperative Extension Service.