Vegetarian Newsletter

A Horticultural Sciences Department Extension Publication on Vegetable Crops

Eat your Veggies!!!!!

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Moving on, but we will miss you!

Compiled by Curtis Smyder, Program Assistant, UF/IFAS Horticultural Sciences, from information provided by friends and colleagues.

This month we would like to send out our warmest wishes and congratulations to our friend and colleague, Dr. Phyllis Gilreath and wish her a happy retirement. Phyllis, who retired this past December as a commercial Vegetable Extension Agent in Manatee County, began working with UF/IFAS at the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in 1982. Since that time she has become nationally known for her expertise in pest management and fertilizer management in vegetable crops. As such, she is a distinguished member of the UF/IFAS family despite her liking of the yellowish-orange and white colors...

Phyllis has had many accomplishments and accolades during her outstanding career. The most recent is her and her husband’s (Dr. James Gilreath) recent induction into the Manatee County Agriculture Hall of Fame on November 15 of this past year.

Here is what some friends and colleagues wrote, reflecting on Phyllis’s retirement:

My association with Phyllis goes back to the middle 80s when Phyllis, Ed Hanlon, and I worked in Manatee County with the tomato growers on fertilizer management. We put a lot of effort into demonstrating and verifying the IFAS fertilizer recommendations. We put out dozens of
on-farm fertilizer demonstrations and gathered a lot of useful data to review the recommendations. Phyllis was a dedicated agent.

Phyllis also will be remembered for her teamwork in the initiation of the “Learning Zone” for the Florida Agricultural Conference and Trade Show. She was committed to the demonstration approach to learning.

Phyllis was a strong supporter for FSHS. She was a regular contributor to the vegetable section of FSHS.

I think Phyllis will be remembered as one of the best vegetable agents for a long time, and one of perhaps the highest respected by her growers.

No one could ask for a better mentor than Phyllis Gilreath. She has been so helpful to me as a new vegetable agent these last five years. Her help with field questions has been invaluable but her help with learning to do all the reports IFAS demands have been, as they say, priceless!!! Phyllis has not only been a great mentor but a wonderful friend. On those days when you are so discouraged with your job because there is another reporting deadline to meet and everyone wants something from you also, talking with Phyllis always helped put things into perspective and she made me feel that I would be able to handle it all. Extension is saying goodbye to one of its best; she is well loved by her growers and has represented IFAS Extension very well. She has set the example of the type of agent we should all strive to become. It has been a great experience working with her and a whole lot of fun!!! I will miss her greatly but wish her all the best in this new and grand adventure - retirement!

A postharvest pathologist, or decay specialist responsible for the “dead” product laboratory, is the last person packinghouses wish to contact. It means they’re having problems with the quality of their product and that’s usually tough for them to admit. Better than any other extension worker, Phyllis was able to get their confidence, learn of their problems and to inform us in Gainesville.
I am a decay specialist and run the “dead tomato” lab in Gainesville. Like the Maytag repairman of the TV ads, for most of my career I was not usually in demand even though there were occasional rumors of decay problems in the industry. Phyllis changed that. Since she officially retired, things have gotten quiet in my “dead tomato” lab again. No more digital photos or little FedEx boxes containing interesting (some would say yucky) tomatoes. Phyllis did this while maintaining an exceptional sense of humor. It was fun to receive her observations. Well, I’ll close this by noting that the “dead tomato” lab is in mourning but wishes Phyllis the best in the future.

Despite some rumors, specialists do not have the exclusive on training agents. A few years in IFAS and working with Phyllis will show you that it is the other way around: agents train specialists (just in a more subtle way)! Although I do work with many agents, the only file I have with an agent’s name on it is titled “Phyllis” (it is 2-inches thick and on the top of the pile!). That’s because on Friday afternoons around 4:30pm, I would get faxes or e-mails with “the question of the day” on all those topics that are so simple that we do not have answers for them: soil testing, fertilization, irrigation management, snake oils, ENSO phases. Every topic was fair game. We’ll miss your experience, knowledge, leadership and friendship, but we will not forget you!

Happy Retirement and Good Luck Phyllis!!! 🤗
Thank you to all of those who contributed to this article.