New Hydroponic Short Course at North Florida Research and Education Center-Suwannee Valley Rousing Success

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An intensive two day short course and optional grower tour was held in March at the North Florida Research and Education Center – Suwannee Valley. The popularity in registrations led to a second course being offered the same week. In all, 70 attendees were able to learn about “Starting a Successful Hydroponic Business”. Attendees came from all over Florida but also from Ohio, New York, Alabama, and Georgia. Most attendees were prospective or very new commercial growers, but six County Extension faculty and three UF students were also able to participate.

Attendees were able to learn about most topics through hands-on experiences in the greenhouses. Important classroom topics included business planning and marketing. Topics inside the greenhouse production area included: greenhouse structures, culture under open shade areas, season extension, soilless media selection, floating systems, nutrient film technique (NFT), growing microgreens, production containers, vertical culture, water and nutrient management, integrated pest management (IPM), selecting vegetable, herb, and cut flower crops, an organic production in greenhouses.

A follow-up survey being conducted indicates attendees rated the short course value very high and encouraged us to offer that course again to other new growers. In addition 100% of respondents want additional intensive single day trainings as well. The two top requests were clearly fertilizer and pest management.

As a result, we plan to offer the course for new growers in March, 2010 and the intensive classes in November, 2009. Growers will select one of three days for the advanced topic class.

Special thanks to all NFREC-SV faculty and staff for making the event such a success. Additional thanks to Dr. Comerford, for his leadership and Al Wysocki, George Hochmuth, Tim Carpenter (Verti-Gro) and Tim Blank (Future Growing), Linda Landrum, Wanda Laughlin, and Lei Lani Davis for helping teach the workshops.

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