Developing Awareness of the Economic Impact of Duval County Agriculture

Most Floridians know very little about the social and economic significance of production agriculture and its associated industries. The truth about Florida agriculture is that it produces over 280 essential commodities to households throughout North America and to 100 international trading partners (FDACS, 2008). In 2007, an annual economic impact of nearly $88 billion was reported for agriculture and related industries in Florida.

- Agriculture is often misunderstood as being only farming. Agriculture is actually an intricate economic system involving agricultural producers, processors, manufacturers, and marketers.
- Brochure and related information takes into account the entire agribusiness system.

Objectives: Provide unbiased insight into the economic impact of agricultural and natural resources systems at the county level. Raise public awareness regarding the financial contribution of agricultural and natural resources to the local economy. Advance the reality that agriculture is the most stable contributor to Florida’s economy.

- The information is research-based from University of Florida economists.
- Agriculture is a powerful economic force in Duval County.
- Agriculture stimulates economic activity.
- Agriculture in Duval County provides 18,114 jobs.
- Florida and Duval County agriculture is diverse.
- All 382 farms are important to our local economy.

Methods: Use research from IFAS (Hodges et al.) and data from the Property Appraiser’s Office to develop an economic impact brochure. Modify the format of a previously developed brochure by Farm Bureau, Cattlemen’s Association and IFAS to convey the importance of local agricultural systems.

- Duval County has over 95,000 acres in agricultural and forestry production.
- The economic impact of agriculture in Duval County is $2.02 billion per year.
- Agriculture contributes $671.6 million in labor income to employees.
- Agriculture pays $52.6 million in local and state taxes.
- Duval County ranks 4th in the value-added impact segment of all 67 counties.

The brochure is a user-friendly and visually appealing means for disseminating the economic, employment and revenue impacts of agriculture and natural resources at the county level. Provide a quick reference for policymakers and extension advocates. Improve sensitivity to local agriculture’s vital role in the community.
The following tips will help you successfully convey the economic impact of agriculture in Duval County when visiting policy makers.

- **Be informed.** The most effective constituent is one who is well informed about both the issues to be discussed with policy makers.
- **Be prepared.** Have data - preferably a) general statewide data, b) data specific to our county, and c) your personal story - what is happening in your agricultural operation. Know your position and the rationale for that position.
- **Be friendly.** Don't let persuasion turn into a threat.
- **Be open.** Be prepared to listen and to speak. But be sure you structure the meeting so you have an opportunity to do both.
- **Be calm.** The better prepared you are in terms of having background information and rationale for a position, the better you will be able to maintain a professional demeanor.
- **Give examples.** Very few policy makers are involved in the agribusiness sector, so the more examples you can give of the impact, the more persuasive your arguments will be.
- **Don't argue.** Your responsibility is to present your case, not necessarily to win your case.
- **Don't apologize.** Never apologize or undercut your position. Remember you are speaking for your farm and your community.
- **Don't get sidetracked.** Don't let other issues sidetrack your primary goal.
- **Don't give up.** Continue to keep policymakers informed about the impact of the agriculture industry.

**Conclusion:** The Duval County agricultural industry needs the support of the UF/IFAS Extension office to remain a powerful economic force in Duval County.

- **IFAS provides support and training to the 2 billion dollar agricultural industry in Duval County.**
- **IFAS Extension provides research-based recommendations and troubleshooting for agricultural producers. This enables farms remain viable and profitable.**
- **Continue to support the cooperative relationship between UF and the City of Jacksonville. UF contributes $1.2 million annually to the Duval Extension.**
- **IFAS offers continuing education and certification programs to 18,114 industry workers.**
- **Last year, over 200,000 residents called upon UF’s local access point for objective, science-based knowledge in agriculture and the environment, family and consumer education and 4-H youth development expertise.**