

## Ag Commissioner observes BMPs at area farm

Adam Putnam, commissioner of the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, visited with a small group of farmers in April at the Gwinn Brothers Farm in McAlpin to learn how area farmers are using best management practices (BMPs) to help protect and conserve water. Suwannee River Water Management District (District) Executive Director David Still was in attendance to speak about water supply issues and what the District is doing to assist farmers in these efforts.

The Gwinn Brothers, along with representatives of the Suwannee River Partnership (SRP) and the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) demonstrated tools and technologies farmers are using to better manage fertilization and irrigation.

The District, through the SRP, has assisted 186 farmers throughout the region by providing cost-share funding for its



**Commissioner Putnam, far right, listens to area farmers discuss their efforts to conserve water. District Executive Director David Still is pictured far left.**

crop tools and irrigation retrofit programs. Global positioning systems (GPS) prevent irrigation and fertilizer overlap; various instruments measure soil moisture and plant nutrient content; precision fertilizer application equipment increases nutrient efficiency; and retrofits for center pivot

irrigation systems increase irrigation efficiency.

Still commended area farmers for doing their part to protect the environment.

"In light of the water supply issues facing our region, we all have a heightened awareness of the importance of conservation, and farmers care about this issue," said Still. "They are irrigating more efficiently and protecting the environment more than ever before.

The District is pleased with the level of participation of agriculture producers in this area."

Putnam echoed this sentiment.

"Agriculture producers around the state are working to use management practices that help protect and save water," he said. "We need to continue to help them by developing new technologies and tools that they can use."

Developing such tools and technologies is what the SRP is all about.

## THE DYE DOESN'T LIE

### Dye test tracks wasteful watering

"The blue dye doesn't lie." That's what Bob Hochmuth, UF/IFAS multicounty vegetable agent, has heard area farmers say about a demonstration his organization uses to illustrate how water and fertilizer move through the ground.

Here's how it works:

Blue food-grade dye is injected into three areas of a drip irrigation system to demonstrate how far water and nutrients seep into the soil after 1, 2, and 4 hour intervals of irrigation. A hole is dug near the injection sites to unearth the movement of irrigation and fertilizer. The depth of the dye is measured in each area to determine whether the substance has been pushed past the root zone.

This exercise is useful in showing farmers how much water and fertilizer each crop needs to thrive without applying any excess that would be lost to the environment. Farmers can then use this knowledge to develop irrigation schedules to make more efficient use of water and nutrients.

"This exercise demonstrates the amount of water and nutrients the plant is taking up, what is being lost to the environment, and the amount needed to precisely deliver water and fertilizer to the crop without waste," said Suwannee River Partnership (SRP) Coordinator Darrell Smith.

Drip irrigation can be used for precision irrigation and fertilization. This is one



**LEFT: blue-dye test at area farm.**

tool the SRP encourages farmers to use to conserve water and protect the environment.

The blue-dye demonstration was performed on April 14 at the Gwinn Brothers Farm in McAlpin. It has been conducted on a number of area farms to help farmers get the most out of irrigation and fertilization applications.

# New river gage enhances water data network

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) collects water data from various monitoring sites along rivers, lakes, and streams within a 15-county region. And that information is made available to the public.

The public can access rainfall totals, water-level data, and water quality data. Real-time data is also available for river levels and rainfall totals.

The public relies on this information during a flood event or for planning fishing or canoe trips.

The District recently added a new gage to its real-time river level network. The Suwannee River at Noble's Ferry gage, located at the County Road 249 Bridge between Suwannee and Hamilton counties, fills a 23-mile gap between the Ellaville and Suwannee Springs gages.

"People in the area around Noble's Ferry and the Alapaha River confluence had a bad time during the 2009 flood," said Megan Wetherington, District senior professional engineer. "(Their) flooding came from downstream when the Withlacoochee and Alapaha backed up the Suwannee River. If they were looking at the Suwannee Springs forecast upstream, the flooding potential was minor. But it was a 50-year event downstream at Ellaville."

While the new gage will not be a flood forecast point, residents can compare future floods to the 2009 crest.

"We tracked the crest using a manual gage, so at the very least people can see

water data through its new hydrologic data portal. The portal provides information on past rainfall, water levels, and water quality data collected from more than 300 monitoring sites within its region.

The new portal uses interactive Google-based maps to display data spatially.

"We hope the new format is user-friendly and we encourage people to browse their area's water conditions and history," Wetherington said.

Real-time river levels and the new data portal are available at <http://www.srwm.d.state.fl.us/index.aspx?nid=345>. For more information contact Megan Wetherington at 386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (FL only).



Henry Richardson, District hydrologic data collection specialist, services the new gage on the Suwannee River.

if future floods are better or worse than the bad one two years ago," Wetherington said.

The gage uses new radar technology which allows the water level to be measured without any equipment actually touching the river, saving thousands of dollars in construction costs.

In addition to the new gage, the District expanded its public access to



The Suwannee River at Noble's Ferry at flood stage.

## Recycling water: Smart move for future water supply

The Suwannee River Water Management District (District) is highlighting its reclaimed water program in celebration of Florida Water Reuse Week May 16-21.

Reclaimed water is highly treated wastewater that is reused for irrigation, toilet flushing, clothes washing, and other

non-potable uses. It has been identified as an alternative water supply to help meet water demands over the next 20 years.

The District is working with municipal water suppliers within its 15-county region to develop the capacity to produce reuse water. To date the District has provided technical assistance and funding to Lake

City, Live Oak, Monticello, Alachua and Cedar Key.

These projects collectively have the potential to offset about 5 million gallons of groundwater use per day.

The District will expand its reuse program to other areas when funding becomes available.