

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Abby Johnson, Office of Communications
Suwannee River Water Management District
386.362.1001 or 800.226.1066 (FL)
www.mysuwanneeriver.com



Doyle and Karl Williams Suwannee Valley BMP success story: Good for the environment, good for business



Pictured left to right farmers Doyle Williams, Karl Williams, and UF/IFAS multicounty extension agent Robert Hochmuth

LIVE OAK, FL June 20, 2016 — Doyle and Karl Williams’ farm in the Worthington Springs area of Union County, combines the art of agriculture with the helpful science of the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Science (UF/IFAS) Extension Service to grow their multiple crops successfully. The Williams brothers have reduced the inputs needed to produce good crops and continue to work to protect the precious waterbodies and natural systems. “We start every year’s crop by pulling a soil sample. Then we do what the soil sample tells us to do,” says older brother, Doyle Williams.

Throughout the growing season, UF/IFAS Multicounty Extension Agent, Bob Hochmuth, visits the Williams brothers' farm and take samples of the crops. Watermelons are one of the crops grown on 40 acres of their farm. Using a unique testing program, the sap within the leaves of the watermelons reveals the plant's secrets. For example, when the samples show the dark green leaves are getting exactly the right amount of nitrogen and potassium, the farmers know to continue what they are doing to keep the fertilizer program on target. By diagnosing the nutrients within the plant and the moisture in the soil, farmers can reduce their fertilizer program as well as water usage on a day-to-day basis. Over the course of the 2016 watermelon season, the Williams brothers kept the nutrient inputs at or below UF/IFAS-recommended levels. The combination of Doyle and Karl Williams' experience and the scientific assistance from UF/IFAS Extension Service, enables the brothers to save water and significantly reduce fertilizers and chemicals.

To visit the "Garden Patch" area of the farm, as Karl Williams calls it, a visitor would be amazed at how healthy all the many crops are. From watermelons to cantaloupes and sweet peppers to snap beans – these brothers brag that Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), such as using drip tape irrigation over the past decade, have resulted in better yields, better quality, and better environmental stewardship on their farm near the Santa Fe River. Refining irrigation management in the field means the Williams' crops only receive the water and fertilizers they need – and no more. Implementation of GAPs demonstrates the Williams brothers' commitment to new food safety requirements, which require farms to deliver clean, healthy produce to their wholesale markets.

Water and fertilizer management are not the ways family farmers are using science to make beneficial agricultural and environmental decisions. The Williams' use pest control options recommended by UF/IFAS partners. The Williams brothers are also participating in an insect pollinator study, which compares bumblebees to honey bees and how both can help on a farm. Chemicals that are harmful to these insect workers are not used on the Williams' farm, as the bees are needed to successfully pollinate the watermelons.

So while not every farmer may use the same set of strategies to minimize inputs on their farms, the Williams brothers know that the "team" approach, using science to guide their decisions, is a win-win for their land, their wallets, and the environment. What is good for business can also be good for our environment.

This story is the fifth in a series of articles provided in partnership with the Suwannee River Water Management District, the UF/IFAS, the Suwannee River Partnership, and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Office of Agriculture Water Policy. This series highlights the remarkable work of local farmers practicing sustainable and environmental best management practices. The interview, article, and photo were submitted by Natalie B. Parkell, UF/IFAS staff writer.

###