

Spotlight on . . .

Lee County Leaders Gain Ag Education



Members of the Lee County Chamber of Commerce Leadership Lee group visited [SWFREC](#) recently as the first stop of their agricultural education day. Center director [Dr. Mike Burton](#) kicked things off with a welcome and brief presentation titled “SWFREC: Kind of a Big Deal in Commercial Fruit Production.” He highlighted two issues at the forefront of ag: Huanglongbing or “citrus greening disease” and efforts to combat the bacteria transmitted by an invasive insect and the regulation of mineral fertilization rates for commercial vegetable production.



“The rest of the challenges facing citrus and vegetable production,” Dr. Burton noted, “didn’t go away when HLB and phosphorus regulation came to hold much attention.”

[Ron Hamel](#), a consultant with the Florida Gulf Coast University’s Center for Agribusiness in Fort Myers, who helped to put the group’s day-long agenda together, provided an overview of the center, its history, and future plans.



Two other SWFREC speakers included:



➤ Ag and natural resource economist [Dr. Tara Wade](#) provided a glimpse into her research program that strives to help growers reach their economic and conservation goals in efficient ways. Agriculture plays an important role in sustaining and improving Florida’s natural resources. This role can be increased, she explained, by measuring the economic value of the services growers provide and implementing policies that reward agricultural stewardship.

➤ Ag economist [Dr. Kim Morgan](#) presented “Economics of Specialty Crops in SW FL: Brief Overview.” She highlighted issues important to agriculture in the region, including exotic pests and diseases, farm worker health and access to labor, global competition and trade policies, water quality and management issues, and food safety regulations. And she provided an overview of her Farm Labor Supervisor Training Program, which provides educational programs to protect the health and safety of farm workers, supervisors, and owners.



A trolley tour rounded out the Leadership Lee SWFREC visit. Citrus horticulture biological scientist Tim Gast served as the guide and introduced the group to current citrus practices to help growers combat citrus greening disease, including individual protective covers (IPCs), citrus under protected screen (CUPS), and injecting trees with oxytetracycline. He also discussed vegetable production, highlighting the utilization of transplants and the use of plastic mulch on formed beds.

