

SWFREC News

January 2026

Welcome to SWFREC News! This newsletter contains news about the center and its faculty and staff, program research updates, and upcoming events.

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Welcome to our Team!

We are excited to announce that Anita Bellot has joined our team as our Human Resources Generalist.



Ms. Bellot brings several years of valuable experience in Human Resources and Financial Administration from FGCU and has deep local roots, having spent her early years in Immokalee. She also holds an MS in Educational Leadership from FGCU.

UF/IFAS Hosts Statewide Citrus Meeting Showcasing Latest Research and Innovations

Citrus growers, industry professionals, and stakeholders from across the state gathered for a UF/IFAS statewide citrus meeting focused on the latest research and practical solutions for Florida citrus production. The event featured updates from UF/IFAS experts from SWFREC, CREC and IRREC.

SWFREC faculty presenting were entomologist Dr. Jawwad Qureshi, weed scientist Dr. Ramdas Kanissery, plant physiologist Dr. Ute Albrecht, citrus pathologist Dr. Ozgur Batuman, citrus horticulturist Dr. Fernando Alferez, and soil microbiologist Dr. Sarah Strauss covering key areas impacting the industry, including pest management, plant improvement, and horticultural practices.



Participants gained valuable, research-based insights that can be applied directly to grove management decisions. In addition to presentations, the meeting offered hands-on demonstrations that allowed attendees to see new tools and practices in action. Fruit tasting sessions highlighted ongoing plant improvement efforts and provided an opportunity to evaluate new selections firsthand. The statewide meeting emphasized UF/IFAS's continued commitment to delivering practical, science-based information to support the resilience and sustainability of Florida's citrus industry.

Seminar Presents Tools to Manage HLB in Citrus Groves.



The January UF/IFAS Zoom Citrus Seminar featured SWFREC Citrus Pathologist [Dr. Ozgur Batuman](#), who presented on “Development and Integration of Practical Tools to Manage HLB in Citrus Groves.” Participants joined the session to learn about current and emerging strategies for managing Huanglongbing (HLB) in commercial citrus production.

Dr. Batuman highlighted several tools available for HLB integrated pest management (IPM), many of which have been developed by the SWFREC research team. These include the use of individual protective covers (IPCs) and plant defense inducers as preventive measures to protect young trees and new flush, as well as oxytetracycline (OTC) trunk injections for managing HLB in mature trees under endemic conditions. He also discussed tools currently in development, such as an automated delivery system for OTC trunk injections, which has the potential to significantly reduce labor costs.

The monthly Zoom Citrus Seminars are coordinated by multi-county citrus agent Dr. Mongi Zekri of the Hendry County Extension Service in LaBelle. To view Dr. Batuman’s full presentation, [click here](#).

UF/IFAS Extension Leadership Connects with Faculty During Center Visit



[Dr. Saqib Mukhtar](#), Professor and Associate Dean for Extension, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and [Dr. Marcelo Wallau](#), Associate Professor, Associate Program Leader for Agriculture and Horticulture visited SWFREC on January 28, 2026 to talk about Extension "Initiatives" with SWFREC Faculty.

They communicated Dean of Extension Dr. Andra Johnson’s emphasis on modernizing Extension programs to best meet the needs of Floridians and an improved system of program evaluation and reporting that will increase the accuracy of impact assessments. Through similar visits, Florida’s Extension leadership has met in person with faculty at nearly all 12 IFAS RECs and will now begin visits with faculty within the academic departments in Gainesville.

Tour Enriches Science Education

Students enrolled at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in Fort Myers recently toured the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center (SWFREC) to learn more about Farm-to-Table sustainability practices.

The visit featured a trolley tour of the farm, narrated by citrus pathologist [Dr. Ozgur Batuman](#), followed by an indoor session highlighting ongoing research at SWFREC aimed at helping farmers strengthen the Farm-to-Table approach. Faculty members [Dr. Tara Wade](#), agricultural and natural resource economist; [Dr. Fernando Alferez](#), citrus horticulturist; [Dr. Ozgur Batuman](#), citrus pathologist and [Dr. Yiannis Ampatzidis](#), precision agricultural engineer; provided overviews of their respective research programs and discussed how their work supports sustainable agricultural systems.



