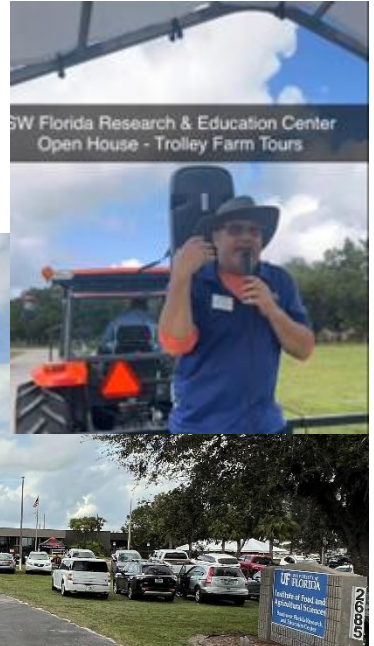


# Spotlight on . . .

## Open House Delivers Top-notch Ag Education

The annual SWFREC Open House proved to be yet another huge success earlier this month! More than 250 people from across south Florida attended the event and received an abundance of agricultural education.



Ten center research programs showcased science demonstrations in the auditorium: Plant Physiology, Citrus and Veg Pathology, Soil Microbiology, Precision Ag, Entomology, Citrus Horticulture, Weed Science, Soil Science Artificial Intelligence (AI), Veg Horticulture, and Water Resources. The booths were organized and operated by graduate students and laboratory personnel. This popular feature of Open House is a competition for cash awards, and the groups continued to impress attendees this year!





*“By far my favorite part of the Open House was the opportunity to speak to the students and discuss their research,” says Ray Bolin, a retired high school business teacher and corn/soybean farmer from Illinois. “As a farmer and retired educator, I wanted to challenge them with their ongoing projects and expectations. I was impressed that every student I spoke to defended their arguments vigorously and logically. The students at the center are able to apply their research on a larger scale.”*



Plant Physiology’s demonstration took first place and \$300; Water Resources, second and \$200; and Soil Science (AI), third and \$100.



Tractor-pulled trolley tours of the SWFREC vegetable fields and citrus grove proved popular once again this year. Riders learned about everything from vegetable transplant production practices to efforts of scientists to help citrus growers battle Huanglongbing, commonly known as citrus greening disease, which causes massive yield loss because of early fruit drop and further tree damage.



*“The annual SWFREC Open House is one event I try not to miss,”* explains Celeste Day, a regular attendee of the open house event and a Master Gardener with the UF/IFAS Lee County Extension office in Fort Myers. *“As soon as your email arrives, I mark my calendar and sign up.*



*It's always interesting to talk to the students year after year about their research and the practical application of their research going forward. I take the tractor ride and always learn something, especially from the older narrators.”*





Lab tours during Open House featured five programs: Weed Science, Plant Physiology, Water Resources, Plant Diagnostic Clinic, and Entomology.

*“I came to the Open House last year and decided immediately that I wanted to bring some of my students this year,”* says Thomas Faatz, ag curriculum coordinator at East Lee High School in Lehigh Acres. *“They need to see what is available in the field of agriculture, and I want them to include talking to interns and people closer to their age. I also want to inspire them to keep in school and consider college in their future.”*



*“Big hits were getting into the labs (they said the liquid nitrogen demonstration in Plant Phys was cool) and, of course, the drones at the AI science demo, the aquaponics for Soils AI, and the farm tour.”*



All in all, the Open House was yet another SWFREC hit for growers, industry reps, students, and homeowners! And the center could not put on such a showcase event without the generosity of our many sponsors, who donated monetary support, refreshing orange juice, and products added to giveaway bags!

Plus, folks got much-appreciated face time in the Sponsor Showcase tent, which included Extension services, Taste of Immokalee, the Redland Christian Migrant Association, and SWFREC’s own Food Science program faculty member Dr. Stephanie Brown.

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



Even seasoned Open House attendee Day reaps rewards when she comes back each year.

*“Everything I learn about horticulture and agriculture is useful as an Extension office ‘help desk’ volunteer,” she explains. “I know where to go and who to ask for ag- and plant-related questions posed by the people of Florida. I learn something new every year!”*







**Thank you to everyone who made the 2024 SWFREC Open House a huge success: attendees, sponsors, and SWFREC faculty, staff, graduate students, and visiting scholars! Be on the lookout for an announcement with the 2025 Open House date!!!**

