

SWFREC News



July 18, 2025

Welcome to SWFREC Update E-news! This newsletter is distributed weekly and contains news about the center and its faculty and staff, program research updates, and upcoming events.

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Spotlight on...

SWFREC Research Puts the Power of AI into the Hands of Florida Growers

In a research project led by a SWFREC artificial intelligence (AI) scientist, [Dr. Nikos Tziolas](#) envisions a way to put the power of AI into the hands of Florida growers. The new project, which stems from a \$297,000 grant from the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, is developing an interactive tool for farmers to assess crop damage after major storms. The conversational AI system utilizes a platform similar to ChatGPT to unlock the value of satellite imagery by making it easily accessible and understandable to non-expert users, such as growers and Extension agents via a simple chat-based interface.

Senior UF/IFAS public relations specialist Brad Buck wrote a press release, "UF Scientists to Develop AI Technology to Help Growers Assess Crop Damage after Hurricanes," about Dr. Tziolas' exciting work. Not surprisingly, the article garnered a lot of media attention. ([See more](#))



SWFREC Faculty Earn Promotions

A recent UF/IFAS faculty promotion announcement includes two SWFREC researchers for 2025!

- Precision agricultural engineer [Dr. Yiannis Ampatzidis](#) has been promoted to full professor.
- Agricultural and Natural resource economist [Dr. Tara Wade](#) has been promoted to associate professor with tenure.



Congratulations, Dr. Ampatzidis and Dr. Wade, on these well-deserved career milestones!

Researchers Set for Expo Lineup

Seven SWFREC faculty members will present research talks at the Citrus & Specialty Crop Expo, which is set for August 20-21 at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa! The Expo is organized by AgNet Media and includes both citrus and specialty crop education and a trade show. The schedule for Thursday, August 21, features these SWFREC faculty presentations during the Citrus Session:

“Optimizing Young Citrus Tree Protection against HLB”—citrus horticulturist [Dr. Fernando Alferez](#).

“Best Practices for Applying Oxytetracycline (OTC) by Trunk Injection”—plant physiologist [Dr. Ute Albrecht](#).

1“Insights on OTC Adoption and Profitability from a Florida Citrus Survey”—ag and natural resources economist [Dr. Tara Wade](#).

“Advancements in Automated Trunk Injection of Citrus Trees”—precision ag engineer [Dr. Yiannis Ampatzidis](#).

“Integrated HLB Management for Florida Citrus”—citrus pathologist [Dr. Ozgur Batuman](#).

“Distribution of Asian Citrus Psyllids in Groves: Natural Suppression and Management Implications”—entomologist [Dr. Jawwad Qureshi](#).

“Methods to Measure Soil Health in Florida Citrus”—soil microbiologist [Dr. Sarah Strauss](#).

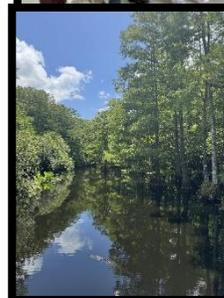


Field Trip Immerses Students in Florida Habitat

Several graduate students and guests took a field trip to Babcock Ranch in Punta Gorda in June in the form of a Swamp Buggy Eco-Tour!

“On the tour, we learned about the unique ecosystems present in Southwest Florida. And we saw a variety of wildlife, ranging from birds to hogs to alligators,” says SWFREC graduate student organization (GSO) president Lauren Fessler Mathews. “Afterwards, we enjoyed a meal at the Gator Shack restaurant that, of course, included gator nuggets!”

The GSO field trip was made possible by funding provided by the UF/IFAS Soil, Water, and Ecosystem Sciences Department on the main campus in Gainesville.



Open House: Save the Date!



UF|IFAS
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

SWFREC
Open House

Save the Date

Cultivating Connections:
Farms, Families, and the
Science of Food

 **Wednesday**
Nov 19, 2025

 **UF/IFAS Southwest Florida**
Research and Education Center
2685 State Road 29 North, Immokalee, FL 34142



Upcoming Events

Citrus & Specialty Crop Expo

August 20-21, 2025

Florida State Fairgrounds, Tampa

[Seven SWFREC faculty members will present research talks.](#) For event details, full seminar agenda, and to register: <https://citrusexpo.net/>.

2025 UF/IFAS Florida Tomato Conference

September 4, 2025

John Boy Auditorium, Clewiston

Program and registration coming soon! For sponsorship opportunities, please contact organizers Craig Frey (craigfrey@ufl.edu) or Meghan Foos (meghanfoos@ufl.edu).

Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association 81st Annual Convention

September 8-10, 2025

The Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grand Lakes

For information and to register: <https://www.ffva.com/>.

SWFREC Open House

November 19, 2025

SWFREC, Immokalee

More information coming soon!

Contact us...



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