

# News



Spring – 2007



Photo courtesy of SFWMD

## Water Issues “Flood” GCGA’s Agenda

During the past few years, citrus growers in Florida’s “Gulf” production region have witnessed a rapid rise in the level of water management issues to address! This “flood” of complex water-related challenges has filled the agendas of the Gulf Citrus Growers Association’s leadership, not to mention the impacts on their grove operations. Through GCGA, growers are well-represented at countless meetings, workshops and public presentations aimed at protecting their existing legal water rights!

Further, with Southwest Florida’s population growth rate pressuring the region’s resources, the issues of water quantity and quality have become “front page” news! Almost daily, the news media reports on water shortages, irrigation restrictions, the Caloosahatchee River, Lake Okeechobee and the various “impacts” to the estuaries and Gulf of Mexico. With “public opinion” often driving the solutions at the local, regional, state and federal levels... the GCGA leadership continues to keep the association engaged and “at the table” in efforts to present “the growers’ perspective”!

Although limited space will not allow a detailed report on all the water issues that GCGA addresses, below are some of the most current and pressing ones:

### Water Restrictions & Allocations

Presently, the “Gulf Citrus” leadership is actively working with the South Florida Water Management

District, the Florida Department of Agriculture’s Office of Water Policy and other key agricultural representatives to address the current drought situation.

Initially, informational meetings were held between growers and water managers as the lack of rainfall and rapidly receding Lake Okeechobee water levels indicated that a water shortage was eminent in South Florida. Conditions worsened with Lake “O” dropping to record low levels! In response, the SFWMD Governing Board recently imposed strict water restrictions on all users, including those in agriculture. Most impacted in the “Gulf” region are growers in the Lake Okeechobee Service Area, including the Caloosahatchee River. They are currently under “Phase II” restrictions, a cutback of 30 percent.

Working through the leadership of MacVicar, Federico & Lamb, Inc., a plan (which was initiated by impacted growers during the record 2001 drought) is being implemented in cooperation with the SFWMD. This “water allocation system,” based on citrus’ and other crop needs, was devised to equitably distribute water supplies to growers during the shortage. Weekly allocations are made by the SFWMD and sent to the respective agricultural water users. GCGA is engaged in coordinating this effort.

Collectively, the area’s network of agricultural groups are in close contact with the SFWMD’s staff to monitor

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# President's Message

It is hard to believe that it's almost time for the Gulf Citrus Growers Association's 21st annual meeting. I am truly honored to serve as the president of such a well-respected, effective regional citrus grower organization. I thank the board of directors for its support and confidence as I complete my second term.

As president, I also express my sincere thanks to our associate members and volunteers who continue to make our "special events", such as the "Country Gala" so successful! As our industry struggles with consolidation and other economic challenges...the support of our associates has enabled the association to keep our governmental and community relations programs and messages effective!

When reflecting on the past couple years, I am amazed at the number and complexity of issues that we've addressed! From battles with citrus canker and "greening" to our fights for water and property rights, your leadership has been your voice at hundreds of meetings and public forums. United as "Gulf" growers...our "voice" is heard and respected throughout South-west Florida! There are not many issues that impact our members...that are overlooked by your leadership!

If there are issues that you feel we are not addressing, I am always available to discuss them with you. So please contact me with your thoughts and ideas!

As I travel around the state and discuss the key issues with growers and industry leaders...I am always very pleased to learn that our multi-county citrus agent, Dr. Mongi Zekri, is so highly



**David Wheeler**

regarded! You may recall that a few years ago, a strong effort was needed by the GCGA leadership to "keep" Dr. Zekri here. He was being recruited away from us by extension leadership outside the state. Several of our members went to Gainesville to convince UF/IFAS administrators that he was badly needed here in SW Florida. Fortunately, they were successful in "educating" the IFAS leadership "to invest" the financial resources to retain him! We are blessed to have such a talented and dedicated person working with us on the many production issues.

Looking into our future, the GCGA Long Range Policy and Planning Committee has been working with the College of Business at Florida Gulf Coast University. You will be hearing more about a study/survey on the future of the citrus growing industry and agriculture in our region. This comprehensive effort has been a project of FGCU's College of Business for over a year. Your leadership felt, that in order to prepare for our future, it would be appropriate to have an independent survey of the region's agricultural leaders about how they see SW Florida's "citrus/agriculture" in the next 10 to 20 years! FGCU's professors who conducted the study, will be presenting their findings at our 21st annual meeting June 6th. You won't want to miss it!

In closing, please know that we are working on **your** behalf and strive to invest our resources to get the most value for the time and dollars! Thanks for your support!



## "Greening" Topic at GCGA Luncheon



Gulf Citrus Growers Association members received the latest information on the "Citrus Greening" disease, in both oral and printed forms from UF/IFAS' scientists as part of a recently held membership lunch program in LaBelle. The luncheon was sponsored by Bayer CropScience.

Drs. Harold Browning, Pete Timmer and Bill Castle provided growers with updated "battle plans" for attacking Huanglongbing, commonly called... Citrus Greening. The three UF/IFAS citrus scientists provided power-point presentations which focused on "immediate" actions that growers can initiate to combat the dreaded disease.

The scientists all noted that although the bacterial disease has plagued citrus

growers throughout the world for many years...there is little definitive and proven research available to the industry at this time. However, they assured growers that this disease is commanding the full attention of the university's top administrators and scientists.

In spite of the current situation, Dr. Browning explained that UF/IFAS staff had compiled all the available information on "Greening" into a notebook/manual, which was being distributed to growers and industry leaders in efforts to aggressively take the initial steps to fight the disease based on "what is known" at the present time. The first copies of the "manual" were released following the presentations.



### Gulf Citrus Growers Association 2006-2007 Board of Directors

- David Wheeler**, President
- Mark Colbert**, Vice President
- Wade Timpner**, Secretary
- Miller Couse**, Treasurer
- Emmett Evans, III**
- Billy Heller**
- Joe Hilliard, II**
- John Hoffman**
- Paul Meador**
- Mike Murphy**
- Steve Smith**
- Dallas Townsend**
- Callie Walker**
- Ron Hamel**  
Executive Vice President

**www.gulfcitrus.org**

#### Publisher's Statement

Gulf Citrus Growers' News is published biannually by the Gulf Citrus Growers Association, Post Office Box 1319, LaBelle, Florida 33975, (863) 675-2180. Postmaster, please send address change to the address above. **Editor: Ron Hamel**

# Elections for GCGA 2007-08 Directors Scheduled



## 2006-2007 Gulf Citrus Growers Association Board of Directors

(L to R) Ron Hamel, Billy Heller, Mark Colbert, John Hoffman, Wade Timpner, David Wheeler, Callie Walker, Dallas Townsend, Steve Smith, Emmett Evans, III, Joe Hilliard, II and Mike Murphy. Absent from photograph are Miller Couse and Paul Meador.

Elections for county citrus grower representatives to serve on the 2007-2008 Gulf Citrus Growers Association's Board of Directors have been scheduled for May 17th and 18th. Wade Timpner, association secretary and chair of the GCGA nominating committee, reminds voting members that following the 2006 reapportionment of directors based on member acreage enrolled... Collier County will elect three (3) directors, Hendry County five (5) and Charlotte, Glades and Lee will each elect one (1) director.

County directors will be elected at the May county annual meetings according to the schedule below. The two at-large directors will be formally elected and the full 13-member board seated at the association's 21st annual meeting Wednesday, June 6th.

### Directors' Elections

#### Thursday, May 17th

**Charlotte County** (One director)  
9:00 a.m. Charlotte County Extension  
Port Charlotte

**Hendry County** (Five directors)  
2:00 p.m. Gulf Citrus Offices; LaBelle

#### Friday, May 18th

**Glades County** (One director)  
9:00 a.m. Gulf Citrus Offices; LaBelle

**Lee County** (One director)  
9:15 a.m. Gulf Citrus Offices; LaBelle

**Collier County** (Three directors)  
11:30 a.m. Barron Collier Office; Immokalee

#### Wednesday, June 6th

**Annual Meeting** (Two at-large)  
10:00 a.m. Hyatt Regency Coconut Point  
Bonita Springs

## GCGA 2006-2007 Board of Directors & Counties of Representation

### Charlotte County

Emmett Evans, III  
Evans Properties

### Collier County

John Hoffman  
Barron Collier Partnership  
Paul Meador  
Gulf Citrus Partners, L.P.  
Mike Murphy  
Cooperative Producers, Inc.

### Glades County

David Wheeler  
Wheeler Farms, Inc.

### Hendry County

Mark Colbert  
Duda Farm Fresh Foods.  
Miller Couse  
Gram & Couse Farms  
Joe Hilliard, III  
Hilliard Brothers, Inc.  
Steve Smith  
Alico, Inc.  
Dallas Townsend  
Dorlas Ranch

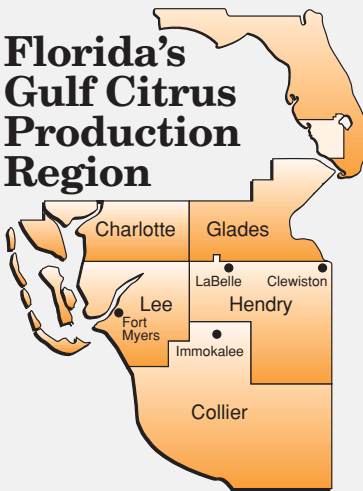
### Lee County

Wade Timpner  
George Austin, Inc.

### At-Large Seats

Billy Heller  
Pacific Tomato Growers  
Callie Walker  
English Brothers

## Florida's Gulf Citrus Production Region



Instructions on the elections will be sent to each registered voting member with ample time to complete the voter registration documents and participate. Please contact Ron Hamel, GCGA executive vice president if you have any questions regarding the process to elect county and "At-Large" directors to the association's board.

# 7th GCGA "Country Gala" Breaks "Support" Record

The 7th annual "Gulf Citrus Country Gala" held Saturday, March 24th at the LaBelle Civic Center was a "down home" success...from all aspects of the fun-filled event! Folks from surrounding cities and towns joined with citrus growers and allied trades supporters in making the evening's festivities exciting and financially "fruitful" for "Gulf Citrus." Funds raised from the "Country Gala" help to keep the association's community and governmental relations programs on behalf of the region's citrus growers properly funded for the coming months.

Miller Couse, GCGA's treasurer and also chair of the 2007 Gala, expressed his sincere thanks to all the volunteers, and the GCGA staff for making the evening so successful. "It takes a lot of time and effort to put together such a "first class" event like the 'Country Gala'," he said. "And all our volunteers did an exception-

ally great job this year, which added to our bottom line...and broke our record for total income raised from the event. Our Gala has become one the region's top social events and brings folks from the urban centers together with our industry for an evening of good food, great 'prizes' and good ol' country fellowship," Couse said. "I cannot thank everyone who had a part in the Gala's success...enough."

About 300 attendees shared in the action-packed soiree, which was supported by a record-breaking 71 sponsors and 36 contributors of raffle and auction items as well as other goods and services to enhance the event.

"Our association is truly blessed and fortunate to merit the level of support that it receives for the Gala," said Ron Hamel, executive vice president of GCGA. "We are especially honored to have the Hendry County Cattlemen's Association prepare

the best steaks in Southwest Florida (any group wish to challenge?) for our meal. And, we are also very grateful that Jack Burges of First Capital Realty, Inc. adds his professional flair to our live auction! These combinations have become traditional to the 'Country Gala,'" added Hamel.

The Gulf Citrus Growers Association expresses a special "thank you" to the 2007 Gala Steering Committee including: **Chairman, Miller Couse, George Austin, Jack Burges, Mark Colbert, Greg Carlton, Mike Murphy, Callie Walker, David Wheeler and Richard Woodruff.** Also "thanks" to our other key volunteers who helped to make our auctions and raffles run smoothly including: **David Bridges, Sharon Burges, Stefanie Cutshall, Bill Federer, Kathryn Hamel, Sarah Hatton, Sonya Tuten and Rachel Walters.**



## The 2007 "Gala": Country Style!

**Top:** Another great group of folks from throughout the region joined in the evening's festivities! The event continues to bring the community together!

**Second Left:** Miller Couse served as the 2007 GCGA "Country Gala" chairman. He reported that the event's success will benefit the association's community and governmental relations programs.

**Second Middle:** Grace Hutchcraft, daughter of Bonita Bay's Mitch Hutchcraft, assists Gala emcee and auctioneer Jack Burges in the drawing for the "Super Bucket" raffle! This year's items were some of the best ever offered!

**Second Right:** Wesley Hansen, Jr. (right) shows his "fightin' Gator" spirit! Sonja Tuten, who provided "extra-special" leadership for the raffle and auction, presents Hansen with an Urban Meyer autographed "National Championship" football for his winning bid.

**Third Left:** Dallas Townsend and his colleagues in the Hendry County Cattlemen's Association continue to "cook up" the best steaks in Southwest Florida!

**Third Right:** Gala "couples" take to the dance floor to help celebrate! The DJ kept the music going...from the light dinner sounds to the more lively dancin' hits!

**Bottom Left:** John Hoffman (right) and the 1st Bank "refreshment team" provided "service with a smile" throughout the evening!

**Bottom Right:** There is no doubt...this "elated" contingent is enjoying their evening at the "Country Gala"! The event is about fun, food and fellowship!



# Thanks

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Country Gala  
Sponsors!



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# 21st Annual Meeting Date & Location Selected

The board of directors of the Gulf Citrus Growers Association has scheduled the organization's 21st annual meeting for Wednesday, June 6, 2007, at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort.

This year's session will be held at the same "first class" facilities as the Florida Citrus Industry Annual Conference hosted by Florida Citrus Mutual, and will coincide with that industry-wide meeting which also begins June 6th and runs through June 8th. The leadership of "Gulf Citrus" encourages members to attend.

The GCGA annual meeting will begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. on June 6th and include a continental breakfast beginning at 9:30 a.m. at the Hyatt. The session will

include reports from the leadership, the election of two "at-large" directors, and the "official" announcement and seating of the 2007-2008 officers and board of directors.

In addition, the results of a study on "The Future of Agriculture in Southwest Florida," which was recently conducted by Florida Gulf Coast University's College of Business will be presented. "This is a report that should attract the interest of our grower and associate members, as well as many others who are linked to the agricultural community in our region," said Ron Hamel, executive vice president of the association.

The Gulf Citrus Growers Association

Scholarship Foundation will also hold its annual meeting in conjunction with the GCGA session.

"I urge all leaders and members of the association to participate in our 21st annual meeting," said David Wheeler, president of Gulf Citrus. "Our association continues to be a strong voice in this region for our grower members."

Members will be receiving an invitation letter to the 21st annual meeting along with the RSVP card. Although there is no charge for the meeting, members are requested to return their RSVP cards or call the office at (863) 675-2180 to make reservations to attend.



# 2007 Citrus Expo Slated for August 22nd & 23rd

Coming off the 2006 Citrus Expo's attendance record of over 2000, the event's steering committee is enthusiastically planning the 2007 version of the world's largest "citrus only" gathering! The committee has scheduled the 2007 Citrus Expo for August 22nd and 23rd at the Lee Civic Center in Ft. Myers! The goal is simple: make the 2007 Citrus Expo even bigger and better!

The Expo steering committee, comprised of representatives of the Gulf Citrus, Highlands County, and Peace River Valley Citrus Growers' Associations, the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center, allied trade representatives, *Citrus Industry Magazine* and Southeast AgNet, has been meeting monthly.

"We are ahead of last year at this time and exhibit spaces are filling up much faster as the industry's key vendors invest in the world's largest, most comprehensive citrus grower oriented seminar and tradeshow program," said Gary Cooper, president of Southeast AgNet. "The growers told us in our follow-up survey after last year's event...that they 'want' and 'need' a strong Citrus Expo experience that continues to provide valuable educational seminars and vendor contact opportunities for grass-roots citrus growers statewide," he added. "And we are planning to provide that to them to the best of our abilities and resources."

The seminar planning committee is again developing a program "by growers...for growers"! Norm Todd, GCGA



**The 2007 Citrus Expo trade show promises to be "first class."**

Expo program chairman, recently noted that the committee is in contact with "world-class" experts on fighting the bacterial disease "greening" in efforts to feature them as seminar speakers at EXPO. Todd explained that the two-day seminar program will feature presentations on managing for "greening" in the grove both "today" and "in the future"! The first day's discussions will focus on fighting "greening" NOW, while day two will look at the nursery/tree replacement situation, as well as futuristic grove designs and management in the face of the disease and global competition. Todd reported that UF/IFAS' Drs. Harold Browning, Bill Castle and Bob Rouse have been engaged in the program planning efforts, and they have received excellent support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture/APHIS. "The seminar program promises to be both timely and extremely interesting, as well as feature international experts" said Todd.

Cooper noted that the tradeshow activities will again feature a very memorable complimentary "Florida Cracker Cookout" lunch for growers, in addition to a "juiced up" biscuit sandwich breakfast both days! "They will take place right at the Lee Civic Center as part of the show," he said.

Grower pre-registration will be available "on-line" beginning June 1, 2007. For more information on the 2007 Citrus Expo log on to [www.citrusindustry.net/expo.html](http://www.citrusindustry.net/expo.html).

The annual Gulf Citrus Expo Banquet will be held the evening of August 22nd at the Harborside Event Center in downtown Ft. Myers.

"We urge all our grower and associate members to plan to participate in and support the Citrus Expo this year. The success of this event truly benefits all the host organizations, including GCGA," said Ron Hamel.

# GCGA Continues to Guard the “Waterfront”

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water conditions and adjust the allocations with a goal of “supply equity” and maximizing the use of limited supplies.

The association continues to receive numerous media calls regarding the drought and its impacts on citrus growers. In discussions with the media, GCGA publicly supports putting more storage in the regional system, and also promotes better management of Lake Okeechobee.

## Citrus BMPs

Following over two years of extensive meetings and workshops administrated through GCGA, UF/IFAS and FDACS’ Office of Water Policy ...the Gulf Citrus Best Management Practice (BMP) Manual, for the five-county region, was “officially” released in February 2006. It was then

adopted by rule under the Florida Watershed Restoration Act. This document now serves as the regional citrus growers’ “menu” of BMPs which address water resource management, erosion and sediment control, pest management and nutrient management. Gulf growers are now in the process of implementing the citrus BMPs. They are working with UF/IFAS “BMP teams” to review their operations via the BMP “check list” from the manual, and to complete “notices of intent” (NOIs) with the Florida Department of Agriculture. With a completed NOI, the grower is operating under a “Presumption of Compliance” with state water quality standards, explains Geovanne Stingham, the region’s UF/IFAS leader.

She further notes that when a grower signs an NOI, an application for cost/share funds is provided. Based on the selected BMPs and a point system, growers can receive matching funds from FDACS.

Stingham reports that the BMP effort is gaining momentum. Since August 2006, 36 growers representing over 48,000 acres have been enrolled, about 34% of the total “Gulf” region acreage. She also notes that the “cost/share” incentive program is very popular, with every applicant receiving cost/share support. Since the citrus BMP program began, Gulf growers have received over \$200,000 in FDACS’ funds.



## Gulf Citrus Growers Add BMPs To Their Groves!

In less than a year, over 48,000 “Gulf Citrus” acres have been enrolled in the BMP program. GCGA continues to encourage growers to participate!

have enrolled over 45,000 acres of citrus in the Gulf Citrus BMP program since the rule became effective last June. That is great progress and I am looking forward to enrolling more acres and making more “cost/share” available,” he said.

Ron Hamel, GCGA’s executive, says “Gulf Citrus is working with the South Florida Water Management District to encourage the district to also “invest” in this very successful BMP initiative. Our goal is to increase the cost/share funding and implement the citrus BMPs on as many acres as we can.”

Growers can get the latest information on the BMPs by going to [www.gulfcitrus.org](http://www.gulfcitrus.org) and clicking on the “water & enviro” header.

## Permit Renewals

Since the SFWMD revised its rules for issuing consumptive use permits in 2003, agricultural permit renewals and “new” permits must meet the new criteria.

Although growers expressed concerns on some of the proposed changes throughout the SFWMD rule adoption process, they supported “the B-List” revisions based on “the board’s” and “staff’s” pledges to work things out at renewal.

Now that the process is underway and reaching time-critical stages, growers are facing difficulties with their renewals

based on some of the revised rules and their interpretation.

Through GCGA, several meetings have been held between growers, farmers and ranchers and the SFWMD’s management to resolve the issues and move forward with permit renewals. Recently, regional Ag leaders have met twice with Keith Smith, deputy director of the water supply department and Bob Moresi, division director of water use regulation. The sessions have been productive and are laying the groundwork for expedited permit renewals. Both sides agree that “unforeseen situations” such as staff changes at SFWMD and Citrus Canker grove/tree losses have complicated the process. The key issues have been identified, along with

workable solutions. And, it is anticipated that the remaining issues will be resolved and the renewal process back on track in the near future.

## Other Water Issues

The association is also communicating with various agencies and the public on many other key water-related issues. It has provided “public comments” at sessions held by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding Lake Okeechobee management including the lake level. It was called upon to meet with U.S. Senator Mel Martinez to discuss Caloosahatchee River flows and impacts. It is engaged in several SFWMD water supply planning initiatives. It has provided input to the Lee County Commission regarding the citrus BMP program and the needs of citrus growers for water supply. And, it has testified before the Joint Legislative Committee on Everglades Oversight chaired by State Senator Dave Aronberg.

As founding GCGA president Hugh English, who served on the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District once said, “Water is the lifeblood of agriculture.” And the GCGA leadership keeps this point in mind as it works to guard the “waterfront” on behalf of its members.



## GCGA Leaders Meet with AG Legislators

The GCGA's Governmental Affairs Committee recently met with Florida Senator J.D. Alexander and Representative Denise Grimsley to discuss the key agricultural issues that were expected to be addressed in Tallahassee this year. Senator Alexander chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, while Rep. Grimsley chairs the Agribusiness Committee in the House.

Both legislators noted that issues involving Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee River and Everglades restoration would be of top interest. They also noted that property tax relief for homeowners would be a major issue, and that agricultural land owners and rural counties should be engaged in these discussions. Both warned that the "Greenbelt Law," governing agricultural property appraisals in Florida, could face unprecedented pressures from urban-oriented legislators.



Rep. Denise Grimsley and John Stitt "visit" during the Hendry/Glades Farm Bureau luncheon following the GCGA meeting.



Callie Walker and her father Hugh English discuss the coming 2007 Florida Legislative session with Florida Senator J.D. Alexander.

*Photos by David Bridges, Farm Credit of SW Florida*

The legislators also reported that state budgets would be tight, and that it will be more difficult to fund new projects. The GCGA committee noted the importance of funding for the UF/IFAS' Southwest Florida Research & Education Center's proposed laboratory which is needed to address "Citrus Greening" issues here in

the "Gulf" region. "Adequate funding for the equipment, supplies, staffing and getting the lab up and running is a high priority for our association," Hamel said. "We look forward to working with Senator Alexander, Rep. Grimsley and other key Southwest Florida legislators to find the dollars for this initiative," he added.

## Gulf Citrus Supports Catholic Farm Worker Housing Effort

Progress continues to be made at the Casa San Juan Bosco farm worker housing development site in Arcadia. The project will include 125 homes and will provide "hurricane proof" housing for about 700 people.

Catholic Charities Housing Diocese of Venice, Inc. is building the \$21-million development which will provide affordable, quality housing for farm workers who harvest citrus grown in SW Florida.

GCGA, Peace River Valley Citrus Growers and RCMA are working with the Diocese and its "housing team" lead by Sister Cathy Buster.



### Bishop Nevins "Promotes" Affordable Housing!

GCGA President David Wheeler, and Ron Hamel confer with Bishop John Nevins of the Catholic Diocese of Venice at the recent "Ground Blessing" celebration in Arcadia. The Casa San Juan Bosco farm worker housing effort is becoming a model for future efforts.

The USDA's Rural Development, the Florida Housing Finance Corporation, the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association and other groups have contributed to this initiative.

**Gulf Citrus appreciates the support of**



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