

Contemporary Issues for Florida Agriculture

Florida Pomegranate Annual Meeting

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Three Main Topics

- Importance of agriculture
- The Marketplace
- Government: Help or Hindrance??



Ag one of three pillars of Florida's economy

- A consistent, economic powerhouse
 - *9.25 million acres of cropland*
 - *\$7.8 billion in cash receipts*
 - *Over 200,000 jobs*
- Kept the state afloat twice in the last 10 years
 - *Post 9-11*
 - *“Great Recession”*



Ag's strength is in its diversity

- Top 3 in the nation in 16 different commodities
 - *Number 1: oranges, tomatoes, sugarcane, bell peppers, grapefruit, sweet corn, snap beans, watermelons, cucumbers, squash*
- No one category (i.e. vegetables, citrus, nursery, livestock) represents more than 25% of total cash receipts



The future is you

- New, high value crops will lead the way to future industry growth and prosperity
 - *Strawberries in the 80s-90s*
 - *Blueberries in the 90s-2000s*
 - *Pomegranates in the 2010s-2020s???*
- How do you overcome production and marketing obstacles to get there?



Research and promotion are essential tools

- IFAS research and extension can lead the way
- Farm Bill provides potential resources to fuel research agenda
 - *Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (\$4.4 million annually)*
 - Marketing and promotion
 - Pest and disease research
 - New and improved varieties



Marketplace is hungry for healthy, “local” foods

- Pomegranates considered a “superfood” by some nutritionists
- “Local” food movement is an opportunity for Florida growers
 - *Florida markets a good outlet for new commodity growth*
 - *Regional U.S. markets are “local” in Florida’s window*



Schools are an opportunity, too

- FDACS school feeding initiative is connecting growers and school food service buyers
 - *Over 2 million meals a day!*
- USDA buys over \$600 million worth of fruits and vegetables each year
- Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program is another opportunity



“headwinds”

- Labor situation is unsettled
 - *Arizona, Georgia, Alabama, etc...*
 - *Lack of federal action*
 - *Problematic H2-A Program*
- Water quantity and quality
 - *Urban v. rural conflict: who gets the water?*
 - *Numeric Nutrient Criteria*



More “headwinds”

- Food safety
 - *Illnesses driving consumer interest*
 - *No commodity exempt from scrutiny*
 - *Marketplace demands for GAPs/BMPs...and audits*
 - *FDA regulations on the horizon*



Despite the headwinds, the opportunities are plentiful

- A healthful product
- Potentially a good market window
- On the cutting edge of a new industry

