

by Dr. Brian Boman

Best Management Practices Director
 University of Florida
 Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
 bjboman@mail.ifas.ufl.edu



Get Onboard With BMPs

“
*In order to keep up
 with the latest
 research, equipment,
 and regulations,
 growers must take the
 time to participate in
 continuing-education
 opportunities
 in order to
 keep up to date.*
 ”

As sure as the calendar changes from one year to the next, Florida's citrus and vegetable growers will face new challenges in 2006 and in the years to come. Some of the challenges we've seen in the last few years — such as the hurricanes, canker, greening, and other new disease and insect pests — are difficult or impossible to accurately forecast. Others — such as urbanization, trade agreements, and market trends — are more easily predicted in general terms, but the effects on individual growers are often difficult to assess. One change that we know will be with growers from now on is best management practices (BMPs). Within a month or two, all Florida citrus, vegetable, row crop, and agronomic crop growers will be eligible to enroll in BMP programs. Within a few years, BMPs will become standard operating procedures for all of agriculture in Florida.

The driving force behind BMP programs is the Florida Watershed Restoration Act (FWRA), which provides a very significant benefit to landowners who enroll in approved BMP programs — not the least of which is a “presumption of compliance” with state water-quality standards. The legislature recognized that when growers enroll in the program and follow the science-based practices in the respective BMP manuals, they are doing everything economically possible to minimize the off-site effects of their growing operations and practices.

Like most other industries, Florida agriculture is continually changing. In order to

keep up with the latest research, equipment, and regulations, growers must take the time to participate in continuing-education opportunities. Many opportunities are offered throughout the year through the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences' workshops, field days, and training events. I encourage you to take advantage of them.

Not only can these educational events help you to be more environmentally responsible, a lot of the information can help you become more efficient and save you money in production costs.

For the BMP programs to succeed, growers must become active participants. Not only should growers make every effort to implement appropriate BMPs for their farming operations, they need to take an active part in the decisions concerning BMP implementation and verification. The BMP programs are in their infancy, and they need to be tweaked and adjusted to make them more effective and efficient. Get involved with commodity organizations and local BMP implementation committees. The lead agencies are willing to listen and need your input to make sure policies can be implemented. In addition, I also encourage you to take every opportunity to educate the media and the non-agricultural community on modern agriculture's essential role in the environment.

Brian Boman