



New leader to elevate Extension

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This month begins a new era in Florida Extension. Andra Johnson brings experience in Extension, teaching, research, administration and service to the job of leading 650 agents deployed across the state to help production agriculture stay profitable.

He's of a new generation of emerging national leaders. I have selected Johnson to elevate the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) to top-5-in-the-nation status in Extension — as we already are in research, teaching and as a public university.

Johnson said during his candidate's seminar that he wants to expand traditional agriculture programming. Yet he wants some things to stay the same: He wants your agent to stay your agent. His vision for keeping turnover low is to provide support so that agents can spend time on the programming they want to do instead of the administrative tasks they have to do.

He also aims to advocate for higher salaries to retain high-performing agents. Other goals include improving the promotion process that ultimately gives an agent freedom to determine in concert with stakeholders how best to serve the local community as well as job security to build years-long relationships.

IN THE FIELD

Johnson has a record of building relationships by coming to stakeholders and meeting people where they are. Now is the time for you to help chart the course of the future. I hope you'll



Johnson

accept his invitations to serve on advisory boards and that you'll reciprocate with invitations to your groves, packinghouses, association meetings and industry events.

As of this writing, I have visited 47 of our 67 county Extension offices, and Johnson and I both expect that he'll get to them all before I do. And he'll be looking to visit with you while he's at it.

Johnson sees Extension as a two-way enterprise. Agents will continue to deliver you science, but Johnson sees stakeholders as valuable sources of information as well. Your field observations, questions and critiques will inform a Johnson-led Extension service and deliver wisdom from the grove back to the lab.

You will find him a dynamic communicator. He is a pastor, and it shows in his delivery at the lectern. In one-on-one conversation, he seeks to listen and understand first.

I'm especially grateful that people

like Mike Sparks, Ray Royce and Peter Chaires showed up for Johnson's interviews. My thanks go to them for helping me vet candidates for what is one of the most important decisions I'll ever make as leader of UF/IFAS.

AG AND WATER BACKGROUND

While Johnson hasn't worked specifically on citrus, he's solidly grounded in agriculture. He grew up on a farm in rural Louisiana where his family raised cattle, corn, cotton and wheat. His grandmother believed lemons lowered blood pressure and cured headaches, and to this day Johnson always keeps them in his home. He consumes oranges daily in a post-workout smoothie. His aunt worked for 30 years for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Johnson studied at two land-grant universities and worked at three before coming here. At one of them, he distinguished himself with his work on water quality. Johnson dispatched students to help small farmers in Louisiana who couldn't afford water testing. The students collected samples and analyzed them for free at a lab on campus. Students got technical training and outreach experience. The project promoted a government-industry relationship based on early detection of problems rather than on regulation and penalties.

He didn't just do this on farms. Because water quality is everyone's responsibility, he worked with mayors on monitoring water quality in cities.

That's the kind of outreach we'll need as Florida continues to wrestle with water quality and adds 900 people a day, which increases the strain on our resources and threatens to encroach on agricultural lands.

I expect Johnson to replicate this philosophy in Florida. Go to producers. Emphasize a preventive instead of a punitive approach. Pursue conservation through preserving agricultural lands.

Johnson arrives in time to participate in the crafting of a 10-year roadmap for Extension's future. He knows he can't get us where we want to be without you. He'll start this month to enlist you as a fellow traveler. 🍊

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