
Agriculture needs more R&D

— *Special to the Harvester*

— By Jack Payne, Senior Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Florida, and head of UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences —

IFAS is asking for your help to make sure the Legislature knows it needs to invest in the future of Florida agriculture. We are requesting a \$5.5 million funding increase to our budget in the upcoming session.

We need more people to meet your growing needs – and to move faster on the things for which you've been awaiting solutions.

We'll prioritize the new funding, sending it to the areas of greatest need. It will be spent on expertise – bringing in more researchers to tackle agriculture's most serious challenges and Extension agents who take those discoveries to your fields, pastures and groves.

Threats to the water supply. Pest invasions. The spread of disease. Fertilizer restrictions. Volatile markets. The list of challenges to your ability to earn a livelihood from the land is growing.

But your R&D shop is not growing. In fact, IFAS is coming off of six years of declining or flat funding. We're down nearly 30 faculty and 300 staff from what the state provided for in 2008.

Agriculture's innovation deficit is even larger when you think about what could have been, given that respected academics now estimate a 20-fold return on investments in agricultural research.

We can't wait another six years for a solution for citrus greening. We have to continue creating popular sellers like the Tasti-Lee tomato. We need to continue diversifying Florida agriculture by helping create new industries like we did with blueberries.

For all IFAS does for Florida, we can do much more. Working together is absolutely essential to build consensus around investing in IFAS so Florida can reap the returns: a healthier economy, environment and population.

We have an added asset in our quest for funding commensurate with the scope of services we'd like to provide: new UF President Kent Fuchs (pronounced "Fox").



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When I visited with the FFVA board of directors in January, I told them that Fuchs professes a solid commitment

to the land-grant mission of research, teaching and Extension. He told me he aspires to visit all 67 Extension offices. I've even heard him say he'd like to try his hand at picking tomatoes to deepen his understanding of Florida agriculture. I will be introducing him at the Florida Agricultural Hall of Fame dinner in February, for which he has agreed to serve as emcee.

Our budget request is to address a backlog of growers' pleas for help and to innovate our way to continued global competitiveness. We aim to turn this investment into fruits and vegetables with more flavor, full-bodied scent, more nutrients and antioxidants, better appearance and longer shelf life. Then we'll take those discoveries into the fields.

More resources translate into crops that are more tolerant to drought and that out-compete weeds. We envision delivering to growers more know-how to use less of everything – water, pesticides, fertilizer, labor – to keep their businesses viable while protecting the natural resources that make agriculture possible in Florida.

There are a lot of new faces in Tallahassee and it is a real challenge and a continuous mission to bring our message to the state's policymakers.

Please contact FFVA leadership or Mary Ann Gosa-Hooks (mgosa@ufl.edu), who leads our government relations efforts, to find out what you can do to make sure your lawmakers make adequate investments in the future of agriculture.

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