

Guest column: Universities of Georgia and Florida often work together

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Pardon me for making this about money, but when the University of Florida and the University of Georgia get together,

The big game brings tens of thousands of visitors to Jacksonville, but the two schools have a much greater economic impact in the field than when they compete on the field.

UF and UGA are the research and innovation arms of our states' agricultural industries, helping fuel a two-state annual economic impact of more than \$200 billion.

In contrast to what happens on the gridiron, in the field UF and UGA often cooperate. Our faculty are engaged in the academic equivalent of sharing our playbooks and practice fields.

SETTING UP ACROSS STATE LINE

The Peach State's land grant university is growing peaches on UF land in Citra, for example, and UF has its fruit growing in a UGA grove in Tifton.

The two universities' researchers are narrowing in on the temperature at which frost kills fruit and when growers really need to use water, wind and energy to save their crops.

This research can simultaneously bolster Georgia's peach supremacy and give Florida a boost as a peach upstart. That, of course, means jobs, sales, trade and the growth and development of businesses that serve peach farmers.

UF Extension agents go to Georgia and UGA agents come to Florida to train farmers in how to keep dozens of crops safe for you to eat.

For example, installing sinks outside bathrooms increases hand washing. We also give reminders and how-tos in testing the purity of the water used to wash produce and monitoring the temperature at which food is stored. And we help each other's farmers put systems in place to track down fruit and get it off store shelves instantly if a piece makes someone sick.

That's vital not just to public health but to economic health. The big grocery stores won't buy from our farmers without proof they've been trained in food safety. And a foodborne illness outbreak can damage an industry for years.

WORKING ON WATER RESOURCES

A water shortage in the huge underground reservoir the two states share could threaten \$9 billion a year in corn, cotton, peanuts and timber as well as the region's fragile springs and rivers.

So UF and UGA are working together to help agriculture use less water and farm in ways that won't make lake and spring water in the state border area unfit to drink, to play in or to keep plants and animals healthy.

We've long worked together on how to grow a better peanut. Today's farmer faces a staggering number of fertilizer and fungicide choices. We provide the equivalent of a Consumer Reports testing service to how a great many of these products worked in our experimental fields.

Land grant universities, such as UF and UGA, have a 150-year-old mission set out by the federal legislation that made them possible: to improve people's lives through research, teaching and outreach.

The schools' agricultural branches have focused on that mission to promote the health of people, of the environment and of the economy.

Our joint research contributes to how affordable and nutritious your food is. It increases water use efficiency, which can reduce your monthly water bill. It supports job creation in your communities, keeps existing jobs at home and helps our states compete in a global marketplace.

Yes, we're football fans, too. BCS logos and Gator eyes have found their way into our academic PowerPoint slides. We'll cheer or commiserate in response to what happens on the field. Then we'll go back in the field where we'll continue cultivating the same crop: prosperity.

Jack Payne, senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources at the University of Florida.