

Agribusiness Today



The Ladies Bovine Society of Southwest Florida discussing the finer points of social distancing.

Comments from the Chair



Jaime Weisinger

Greetings from your new chairman. First off, I'd like to honor Ben Hill Griffin III for all of his contributions, not only to our FGCU Center for Agribusiness advisory committee, but to the agriculture industry as a whole. The Tampa Tribune once referred to him as the 'Citrus King' and while we all knew him simply as Ben Hill, he certainly had that effect on the farms that once stood proudly on the land where the FGCU now resides. As chairman of Alico, Inc., Ben Hill was instrumental in donating the nearly 1,000 acres of land so that FGCU could be established. The legacy of his agricultural influence at the university persists today with the three Alico chairs and now the Center for Agribusiness that he saw through to fruition before his passing. While his input will be missed, our sincere gratitude goes out to him and the traditions that he leaves us.

Meanwhile, the Center for Agribusiness continues to grow and was proud to announce that enrollment continues to expand even in the time of COVID. The school is functioning and 71% of our students are in live classes while the rest are in some blend of remote and face-to-face learning. President

Martin informed us at our fall meeting that he is committed to AG education and the role that FGCU plays along with the "Land Grant" University of Florida to conduct agricultural research and enhance education.

As the program expands, we felt it was best that we continue to evolve our advisory committee. We were proud to introduce four new advisory committee members at our fall meeting who came highly recommended to us. They are Mitch Hutchcraft of King Ranch, Stephen Massie of Barron Collier Company, Aaron Troyer of Troyer Brothers, and Ryan Duffy of U.S. Sugar. Everyone, except for Ryan, was able to participate in the meeting. We are thrilled at the prospect of their valuable input.

At our meeting, we were also excited to hear from Professor Magnier and the addition of a new Food Policy course that potentially could be expanded to include some broader public agriculture education. Dr. Laura Birou, a new Alico Chair, also updated the group on the Center's role in the research of COVID's impacts on Agriculture. We heard how important it is to understand the effects that the pandemic has had on local agriculture, in particular, and FGCU's role in the research.

Remembering Ben Hill Griffin III



Ben Hill Griffin III
(1942 – 2020)

Florida Gulf Coast University and its newly created Center for Agribusiness recently lost its most generous benefactor and greatest promoter with the untimely passing of Ben Hill Griffin, III on July 25, 2020.

In 1991, while President and Chairman of the Board of

Directors of Alico, Inc., Ben Hill Griffin, III offered the State 760 acres of land on which to build Florida's "10th" university, now entitled FGCU! In addition to this generous land donation, Griffin and Alico, Inc. added 215 more acres, funding for road construction, royalties from mining and farm leases, and funding for academic endowed chairs in the College of Business. At the time, Charlie Edwards, chairman of the Florida Board of Regents, noted that Ben Hill's gift(s) given for the university's birth was recognized as the largest single contribution to the State University System, and it created the impetus for Southwest Florida to quickly advance FGCU to its role as the comprehensive university and regional economic force that it is today.

In addition to his financial support, Griffin became personally engaged in many aspects of the development of FGCU. His family interest in both academics and athletics led to funding for scholarships and for the construction of the Alico Arena in 2001, for which Alico, Inc. donated \$5 million to support university athletics.



**Flag at half-staff
in memorial**

In efforts to link FGCU, in its formative years, with the region's progressive agricultural community, Griffin established and funded three endowed academic chairs in the College of Business. Working with Dean Richard Pegnetter, he and Dr. W. Bernard "Bernie" Lester created these three "Alico Chairs," and the distinguished professors became immediately engaged in assisting regional agri-leaders with business-related challenges. Over the years, the "Alico Chairs" have conducted programming and research projects beneficial to the region's agricultural producers.

All four FGCU Presidents, Roy McTarnaghan, William Merwin, Wilson Bradshaw, and Mike Martin had the interest and support of Ben Hill to advance the university's programming. In 2018, Martin established and funded the FGCU Center for Agribusiness in the Lutgert College of Business to honor the initial "vision" and "desire" of Ben Hill to better serve the business needs of Southwest Florida's agriculture and to educate FGCU students and community leaders as to the economic significance and importance of the region's AG industry.

After establishing the Center for Agribusiness, President Martin recruited Ben Hill and Dr. Bernie Lester to serve on its first Advisory Committee, along with other regional agriculture leaders. Ben Hill actively participated in the Center's meetings and activities up until his passing. In a letter to President Martin following the Center's launch, Ben Hill wrote, "FGCU's commitment to the region's agricultural economy has been enhanced through the establishment of the Center for Agribusiness. In light of this exciting new effort, I strongly encourage you and other FGCU administrators to reexamine the academic roles of the existing Alico Eminent Scholar Chairs so that they become more formally integrated into the Center and thereby better serve the Southwest Florida region's agricultural community. While the Alico chairs would be assigned to their respective departments, it is my opinion that their individual roles and expectations should be reviewed to the benefit of the new Center. I believe this to be very appropriate and I encourage this effort." President Martin and LCOB Dean Chris Westley are implementing Ben Hill's recommendations.

At its October 1, 2020 session, Center's Advisory Committee Chairman Matt Caldwell called for a minute of silence in honor of Ben Hill Griffin, III. President Martin, in his report to the committee noted Ben Hill's years of support, leadership and "vision" for FGCU, noting the "goal" of educating its students and regional community on the importance and significance of AG in S.W. Florida. "In honor of Ben Hill, this should be our 'goal' through this Center... educating students and the region of agriculture's importance," said President Martin.



(L-R) Griffin and Martin

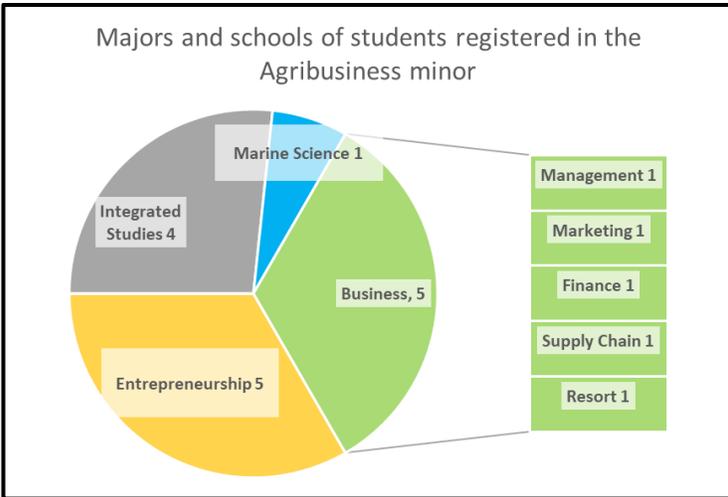
Student Enrollment is Up!



Dr. Alex Magnier

We are now well into our second year of teaching agribusiness courses at FGCU, which makes it a good time to share an early assessment of our students' degree demographics and overall program growth.

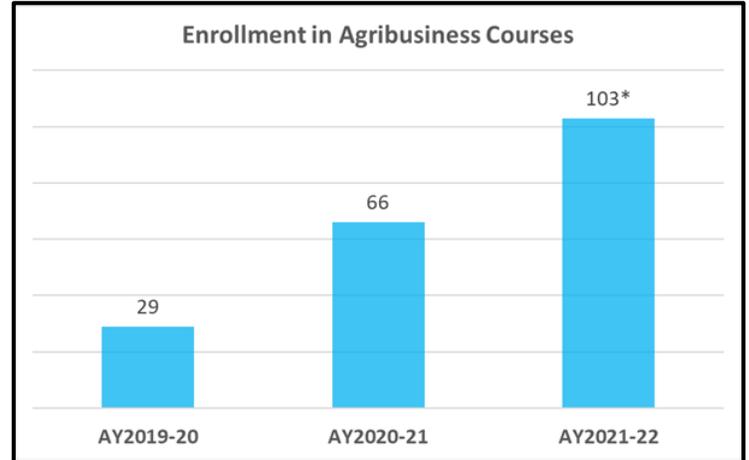
The graph below shows that we now have fifteen (15) students who have declared a minor in agribusiness. About a third of them come from the FGCU's Lutgert College of Business, another third from the School of Entrepreneurship, and the last third from the College of Arts and Sciences. All the five business students enrolled in our program come from a different major, each of them corresponding to one of the main departments of the Business School.



In our efforts to recruit students, we have found that business school students do not have much flexibility in choosing free electives beyond the courses that they are required to take to complete their major. However, students in the College of Arts & Sciences, particularly majors in Integrated Studies, and the School of Entrepreneurship have much more flexibility in building their study curriculum. As could be expected, most of the students enrolled in the minor are associated with the two schools and programs that provide them with the flexibility to customize their curriculum.

Our enrollment keeps increasing. Sixty-six (66) students registered in agribusiness courses during the 2019-2020

academic year. We are only halfway through the 2020-2021 academic year, and seventy-five (75) students have enrolled in the four courses that we are teaching in the Fall. Two more courses will be taught in the Spring, so we expect total enrollment for the 2020-2021 academic year to be significantly higher than the previous year.



First FGCU Graduates with the Agribusiness Minor

On December 12, 2020, David Whittaker and Marco Acosta became the first FGCU students to graduate with a minor in Agribusiness.



David Whittaker



Marco Acosta

David plans to pursue a graduate degree in medical cannabis at the University of Maryland. Marcus will take over as the manager of FGCU's Food Forest.



(L-R) Fritz Roka, David Whittaker, Marco Acosta, Dean Chris Westley, and Alex Magnier

Center Advisory Committee Holds 3rd Meeting Virtually

The FGCU Center for Agribusiness Advisory Committee held its third meeting on October 1, 2020, virtually via Microsoft Teams video conferencing.

After a moment of silence to honor the passing of Ben Hill Griffin III, President Mike Martin extended an opening welcome and his sincere thanks to the region's agricultural leaders for their willingness to guide the development of FGCU's Agribusiness Center. Following President Martin, Dr. Chris Westley addressed the committee for the first time as Dean of the Lutgert College of Business.

The gravel of chairmanship was passed from Matt Caldwell to Jaime Weisinger. Jaime recruited Mitch Hutchcraft to serve as the next Vice Chair for the advisory committee. In addition to Jaime Weisinger, Matt Caldwell and Mitch Hutchcraft, our current advisory committee members include Dr. Tim Cordes, Miller Couse, Ryan Duffy, Charlie Edwards, Hugh English, Joe Hilliard II, Dr. Bernie Lester, Stephen Massie, Russell Priddy, Stacy Mello, Dr. Ken Smith, Aaron Troyer, and Dallas Townsend.

New members joining our Advisory Committee



Mitch Hutchcraft
Vice President, King Ranch / Consolidated Citrus Limited Partnership

Hutchcraft leads strategic planning, land use and lobbying activities for King Ranch.

He holds MS and BA degrees from the University of Florida. "Success in agriculture not only requires that you are a good producer, but it also requires an understanding of property rights, emerging trends, educating the public, navigating governmental regulations, and rapidly responding to unforeseen events," he says.

(<https://floridatrend500.com/agriculture/mitch-hutchcraft/>)



Ryan Duffy
Director of Corporate Communications, US Sugar Corporation

Duffy holds a master's in Political Management from George Washington

University and a bachelor's from Florida State University. He is a member of the James Madison Institute Board of Advisors and a member of the Knights of Columbus. He was a recipient of the FSU Alumni Association's 2013 "30 Under 30" Award and was also named one of Florida Politics' "30 Under 30" rising stars in Florida politics.

(<https://www.ussugar.com/news/u-s-sugar-welcoming-ryan-duffy-as-director-of-corporate-communications/>)



Stephen Massie
Produce and Sales Manager at Collier Family Farms

Stephen joined Barron Collier Companies in 2013. He leads new agricultural business development within Barron Collier Companies. Stephen has deep roots in the Big-10 where he earned

degrees in Communication at The Ohio State University and Strategic Sales and Marketing from Northwestern University.



Aaron Troyer
President, Troyer Brothers

Aaron heads Troyer Brothers is a third-generation family owned and operated company. His academic roots are with the University of Florida. Aaron and his

company pride themselves in producing the highest quality, best tasting red, yellow, white, and purple potato varieties during the winter and spring. All varieties are gluten-free, non-GMO verified and developed using traditional plant breeding techniques. (<https://troyerbrothers.com/>)

2020 Farm-City Week Proclamations

Despite the challenges of Covid-19, the Center continued to work with the region’s County Farm Bureaus to recognize the significance of “agriculture” in Southwest Florida through Farm-City Week (Nov. 18-25, 2020).

Although city and county leaders in the region were reluctant to hold “in-person” presentation ceremonies, Collier County and Ft. Myers formally recognized Farm-City Week with proclamations. In Naples, Collier County Commissioner **Bill McDaniel** presented the county’s proclamation via “Zoom” during an early November commission session. In Ft. Myers, newly elected Mayor **Kevin Anderson** presented the city’s proclamation on November 16th to Ron Hamel, representing FGCU’s Center for Agribusiness and Lee County Farm Bureau representatives Cory Dombrowski, Keith Councill and Tim Eckert.

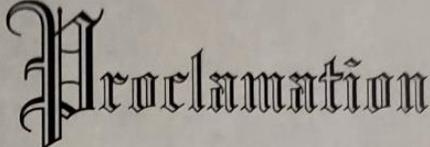


(L-R) Hamel, Dombrowski, Mayor Anderson, Councill, & Eckert

The Center plans to continue to work with the region’s Farm Bureaus to promote the economic and environmental attributes of agriculture through the annual Farm-City Week, as well as expand the effort in the coming years to include County school systems in addition to the city and county governments.



The City of
Fort Myers, Florida



Proclamation

Whereas, National Farm-City Week is a time set aside to recognize and honor the contributions of the country’s agriculturalists and to strengthen the bond between urban and rural citizens; and

Whereas, in Southwest Florida’s five-county region including Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee counties...the agricultural and natural resources industries contribute over 8-billion dollars annually to SW Florida’s economy; and

Whereas, over 40% of the land in the five-county region is in agriculture, totaling over 1.3 million acres; and

Whereas, this agricultural land mass contributes immensely to the region’s water recharge and wildlife habitat; and

Whereas, the region’s farmers, growers and ranchers have been good stewards of the land for generations; and

Whereas, dollars generated in the rural, agricultural areas of our SW Florida counties are spent in the urban cities adding to the total prosperity of our region; and

Whereas, 2019 marks the 64th year of the National Farm-City Partnership; and

Whereas, we encourage all citizens to pause to recognize the contributions of our local farmers, farmworkers, growers and ranchers to our economy, our food supply’ and our society.

Now, Therefore, I Kevin Anderson, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Fort Myers, Florida, do hereby proclaim the week of November 20 through 27, 2020, as

National Farm-City Week

in Fort Myers, and urge all citizens to show their appreciation to the region’s farmers, growers and ranchers.

In Witness thereof, I have hereunto set my hand and the Great Seal of the City of Fort Myers, Florida, on this 16th day of November in the Year of our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty.



Kevin B. Anderson
Mayor





Center Hosts 2nd Annual Agricultural Forum

On November 18, 2020, The FGCU Center for Agribusiness hosted its 2nd Annual AG Forum. The theme of this year’s program was Covid-19 and how the pandemic impacted Florida’s food and agricultural supply chains. This project has been a collaborative effort between FGCU and UF/IFAS faculty.



The goal of our work has been to capture some of the stories behind the pandemic – how were individual companies affected; how did they respond; and what new insights did they learn that may help cushion future supply chain disruptions. More than 60 agribusiness operations have been interviewed throughout the state, ranging from agricultural input suppliers to food bank organizers. Drs Mike Martin (FGCU) and Scott Angle (UF/IFAS) kicked off the Nov 18th program with welcoming remarks. UF and FGCU team members proceeded to summarize some of the preliminary findings. More interviews are being sought to enrich what has already been collected.

The one-hour, 45-minute program was recorded and posted as a YouTube video. You may access the video through our website: fgcu.edu/cob/agribusiness or go directly to the video link: youtu.be/4RT4mUitl7E. All the interviews are being transcribed and will undergo more intense analysis.



Covid caused significant disruptions at food wholesale distribution points



A significant amount of fresh fruit and vegetables were diverted from the food service sector (hotels, theme parks, restaurants) to retail grocery stores.

The Director’s Report



Dr. Fritz Roka

August 2020 marked the beginning of FGCU’s Center for Agribusiness 3rd year. Despite being in the middle of a one a century pandemic, our Center picked up steam both in the class room and across the Southwest Florida agribusiness community. Alex Magnier’s report highlights how our student numbers continue to increase. Probably more significantly, we have 15 students committed to completing the Agribusiness minor and we are attracting attention from across the University. Our first students with the Agribusiness minor graduated this December.

With leadership from Ron Hamel and Michael Thompson, a member of the East Lee County Chamber of Commerce, we have been building a relationship with Lee County high school agricultural teachers. Our goals are to add instructional value to what the agricultural teachers are already doing, while at the same time encouraging high school seniors to think about attending FGCU and enrolling in the Agribusiness minor.

When Ron Hamel and I visited with the Florida Farm Bureau in Gainesville back in March (just prior to Covid lock-down), we heard about Farm Bureau’s Agricultural

Director's Report continued from page 6

Education Services and Technology (AEST) program. It turns out Lee County Public School agriculture teachers adopted AEST and are certifying their students in agricultural technology and natural resource management. Under discussion is the idea that such a certification could also constitute college credit at FGCU. There are a number of details to explore, but it presents an interesting idea that would benefit both high school seniors and the FGCU Agribusiness program.

During the early months of 2020, Alex and I were making solid headway in recruiting efforts. On campus events such as "Say Yes to the Nest" and Eagle Expo attracted several hundred prospect students to FGCU. In-person meetings with counselors at Riverdale and Immokalee High Schools got us some additional exposure off-campus. Increased signage and regular meetings with student advisors were showing signs of increased awareness among the FGCU student population.



Enticing prospective FGCU students to say "Yes to the Nest" in (pre-covid) February 2020.

Since mid-March, Covid took over and dominated. Like every other Florida schools, we were forced to shift our classes into remote and virtual spaces. While most instructors, including Alex and me, prefer the face-to-face teaching environment, distance education has pushed us to learn new technologies and methods of engaging our students. It's been a bumpy ride, but in the end, I believe we are better teachers and our students will benefit from having greater flexibility to learn important material.

With great challenges, come new opportunities arise, and one did – an opportunity to work collaboratively with folks from UF/IFAS. Since early May a group of us have been meeting regularly to design a project around which we can document some of the impacts the Covid pandemic has had on our food and agribusiness supply chains. The project started as just between the FGCU Agribusiness Center and the Lee County Cooperative Extension office, but it quickly expanded to compass the entirety of UF/IFAS. The project involves collecting the individual stories of how specific farms, input suppliers, processors, trucking companies, and other ancillary agribusinesses were affected by the pandemic. The first part of our project culminated as our 2nd Annual Agricultural Forum on November 18th. FGCU and IFAS faculty presented some of our preliminary findings. The complete program can be seen as a YouTube video whose link appears earlier in this newsletter or on our website: fgcu.edu/cob/agribusiness

Undoubtedly the financial impacts of Covid on our state's economy will reflect in significant budget cutbacks during the next fiscal year. While state dollars will remain at the core of our Center's funding, we must find ways to build up a Foundation Account in order to establish Center programs and provide services that cannot be funded entirely through state dollars. Toward that end, we have been very fortunate to be the recipient of a generous \$25,000 donation from Duda. Once Covid restrictions pass, such funds will allow us to resume farm tours, workshops, agricultural forums, and other events to highlight the important environmental, social, and economic contributions from agricultural operations in Southwest Florida.

Water School rising upwards

If you have been on campus recently, you likely have seen the construction of Academic Building #9 – the future home of The Water School. The Center for Agribusiness is part of The Water School and we look forward to being part of several projects that study how agricultural operations contribute to the environmental health of the Southwest Florida region.



Construction underway:
future home of The Water School.



Watching intently. GO Eagles.

Agribusiness Classes at FGCU

- **AEB 2004 - Sustainable Agriculture**
- **AEB 2104 - Food & Agricultural Economics**
- **AEB 3133 - Principles of Agribusiness Management**
- **AEB 3144 - Agribusiness Finance**
- **AEB 3300 - Food & Agribusiness Marketing**
- **AEB 3350 - Food Supply Chain Management**
- **AEB 3933 - Special Topics in Agribusiness**
 - **Cannabusiness (Fall 2020)**
 - **International Trade of Food and Agricultural Commodities (Fall 2020)**
- **AEB 3943 - Agribusiness Internship**
- **AEB 3951 - Project in Agribusiness**

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