

Florida 2000 symposiums help IFAS focus on shifting economy

BY TOM BENEFIELD

The first-of-its kind meeting was held at three locations around the state in late fall. These meetings were sponsored and provided by the administration of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Science at the University of Florida.

The focus of these meetings was consistent with its title. To provide input to IFAS on the direction the people of the state of Florida think IFAS should be going. A mission if you will as to how IFAS may change its current goals and programs to better serve the citizens of the state.

The necessity of these "town hall" meetings is prompted by the shrinking agricultural population of the state and the large urban sector which demands more attention. The original mission of IFAS was geared to agriculture and production of agricultural commodities. The new mission is likely to take on an entirely new outlook.

The audience in Broward County was immensely diverse with all fragments of urban and rural society represented. From Home Economics educators, to Sierra Club members to grove and nursery operators, everyone had time to state his case.

A recurring theme was the need for more programs to provide help for those who are helping people on the most basic level of subsistence. Nutritional educational programs and job training programs in both large and small communi-



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Dr. Terril Nell, chair of the UF/IFAS environmental horticulture department, at the IFAS Florida 2000 Symposium in Fort Lauderdale

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ties were asked for. Several of these speakers talked of the successful programs already coming through IFAS and the need to enhance and enlarge them. I learned quite a lot from listening to these people who in their own environment were on the front lines working hard to make a difference in their communities.

Other topics talked about were how IFAS could do better at their primary mission of helping agriculture. Issues of employee safety training programs echoed around the room as well as requests for IFAS to restaff field and research positions lost in the last three years.

The green industry spoke briefly on our relationship with IFAS through our funding activities. We stressed the need to keep this relationship ongoing and building on it. Our concerns on the much-talked-about IFAS Broward County Research Center land swap with Florida Atlantic University for a parking lot was discussed with UF President John Lombardi after the meeting.

We stated our case for the need to keep the Broward County IFAS research facility in its present location. As we talked, he listened to us and nodded his head in understanding. We left with the feeling that we had gotten our point across. All in all, it was a very positive meeting with everyone getting a chance to share his views.

My hat is off to President Lombardi and the administration at IFAS. Not every university has an outreach program like IFAS. Not every school has the ability to do the things IFAS can do. But the University of Florida has this unique ability with IFAS to develop programs for which their citizens can share. I think the university took a tremendous step in sponsoring these "town hall" meetings. Showing insight and foresight, they are sending a message to the people of the state, saying they plan on doing their job as best they can, but they need our input and we thank them for that.