

I've just returned from a meeting in Orlando at the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association building in which the new vice president for IFAS, Dr. Mike Martin, was introduced to the ag industry by UF President John Lombardi. On first impression, we've got a capable and motivated man now in charge of IFAS, and he may be the man of vision to lead Florida agriculture, including turfgrass, into the next century.

Sitting around the table with leaders of such industries as citrus, cattle, sugar, tomatoes, strawberries and poultry was gratifying, because I think turfgrass should be aligned with agriculture rather than pigeonholed into its own special niche

that no one seems to care about except us "grunts" who bear the burden for a huge but unmotivated industry. I feel more of a kinship with the people who were in that room than I do with the majority of the members who play my golf course; more importantly, I think it in our best interests to get on board with agriculture

in dealing with IFAS and the Legislature. David Barnes and Ralph White, also in attendance, agree that we should strengthen these ties and begin active participation in this group, probably the core of a revitalized Florida Ag Council.

The meeting was an eye-opener. Apparently turfgrass isn't the only commodity group less than satisfied with its relationship with IFAS. In some regards, such as input into research project selection, we exert more control than most of the other groups — even those who put in a lot more money than we do.

A big concern — one I hadn't realized — is how often an IFAS researcher accepts grants from an environmental group or a regulatory agency like the South Florida Water Management District, and the results are used to harm, hobble, or destroy some part of Florida's agricultural industry. As it was pointed out to Drs. Lombardi and Martin, none of us minds adjusting to concerns based on real science, but pseudo-science and politically motivated regulation is unacceptable and especially galling if its basis comes from an IFAS department which is also heavily funded by our industry.

I've been in Dr. Lombardi's presence enough

times now that I shouldn't be surprised by the depth and range of his intellect and insight. Nevertheless, I was impressed by his understanding of agriculture and the strategies and technology it must develop to face the challenges of a global economy. He told of changes already in place, such as faculty accountability, financially crediting the proper department for students taught, and of consolidating the IFAS and UF budget proposals — all of which should be of benefit to IFAS — leaving me with the impression that he fully understands that agriculture is the foundation of our society.

I am not so naive as to think that "feel good" meetings always translate into action, but I am encouraged that we have a president and a vice president who will help us to help ourselves. The accomplishments of the past two-and-a-half years are significant even if we have been disappointed in the pace at which they have happened and at those needs as yet not met.

We finally have a turfgrass coordinator, Dr. John Cisar, to take the lead in our dealings with IFAS and unify the various stations into a coordinated, effective program. We have more turfgrass students at the University of Florida than we've had in many years and, for the first time, they can get a degree in turfgrass science. We have two new turfgrass breeders, Drs. Russell Nagata and Brian Scully, who are talented, dedicated, and dynamic. We have a pathologist renowned for his rice disease research, Dr. Lawrence Datnoff, who wants to work in turfgrass if he can get some financial support. We have a whole new branch in Milton headed by Dr. Bryan Unruh that is enhancing the entire turfgrass program rather than just serving its region.

Thanks to our equipment manufacturers and distributors, the turfgrass program has over \$100,000 worth of new equipment with which to maintain the plots and research greens. While many other turfgrass programs in the South are going south, we continue to make progress.

The FTGA and the FGCSA are working together on strategies to increase funding for turfgrass research projects. Ron Garl, as the new president of the Florida Golf Alliance, and Roy Bates are working to secure support from the allied organizations of that group as well. With continued effort, we will make the UF Turfgrass Program the best in the country, serving the needs of the biggest and best golf and turf industry in the country.

IFAS, Agriculture and Us

Mark My Words



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