

Mark My Words Food for Thought...and the Economy

By Mark Jarrell, CGCS

The economic "down-turn," if that is the appropriate word to describe what the country has experienced for the past few years, has not hit Florida as hard as it has most of the other states. One big reason is because the agricul-



ture and natural resource sectors - those industries served by IFAS research and extension, which includes turf management - performed better than any other major sector of Florida's \$484 billion economy during this period.

Between 2001 and 2003 personal income in Florida increased by 7.6 percent compared to 4.8 percent for the rest of the country. Of 22 major industry sectors of Florida's economy surveyed during this period, only management of companies and enterprises (27 percent), exceeded farms (26.2 percent) in personal income growth. I don't know quite what to think about these numbers that were generated by a recent University of Florida/IFAS economic impact study.

My long history of working through FTGA and FGCSA committees with IFAS has been continuous frustration that our legislature cuts the IFAS budget year after year, failing to recognize that agriculture and natural resources are the heart and soul of Florida and its economy. No matter what a governor or a group of legislators would like Florida to become, ignoring what it is just never made any sense to me.

Kudos go to all those working in the green industries, who have performed so well despite the lack of support by those who write legislation and set state budgets. My question is how long can this strong performance go on as IFAS continues to be hamstrung by dreamers and urban legislators who've never had dirt under their fingernails?

While trying to attract more high-tech industry, with its higher incomes, to our state is a worthwhile goal, it would seem to be an intelligent strategy to ensure that the industries that are currently serving the needs of the people of this state are protected and supported. Agriculture and natural resource industries - which include such diverse enterprises as citrus, forestry, seafood, sugarcane, vegetables, ornamentals, and turf - generate about \$62 billion in output impacts (\$31 billion in value-added impacts). About 650,000 people work in these industries, generating \$19 billion in labor income and nearly \$3 billion in indirect business taxes. Florida's unemployment rate hovers around 5.1 percent, while California is at 6.6 percent, North Carolina is 6.1 percent, Oregon is 8.2 percent, Colorado is 5.8 percent, Massachusetts is 5.5 percent, and Washington is at 7.3 percent - states specifically pursuing economic development strategies based on high tech industries.

The diversity of Florida's agriculture and natural resource industries is impressive - not only do we have more golf courses than any other state, but our citrus, seafood processing, and at least nine other crops are tops in the nation. While this diversity gives our economy a stability and balance that other states don't have, it also makes it difficult to secure private research and development investment - 12 million acres of corn in Iowa will attract more investment than our 850,000

acres of citrus. One would think our legislators would recognize the value of this diversity to the stability of our economy and try to nurture and preserve it by increasing the investment in the kind of research and extension that IFAS does so well, rather than continuing year after year to decrease it.

As for tourism, am I just being simple-minded, or is it just common sense to think that people visit or move to Florida because of our great weather, water, beaches, fishing, golf courses, and green spaces? Yes, we have Disney World and other attractions, but so do other states. I love visiting San Francisco, but when I jump in the car I want to see Napa Valley, not Silicon Valley. Let's hope that Mike Martin can find a way to make this message resonate with the powers in Tallahassee.

As it Lies The Times They Are a' Changing

By Jim Walker

A couple of years ago, players on the PGA Tour, European Tour and Senior PGA Tour were asked what was the single most important advancement which has led to the superior quality of play today. Most people expected the answer to be new and better clubs and balls or the conditioning of the



players who are stronger and in much better shape, or a combination of those factors. To everyone's surprise, the answer almost to a man was the condition of the turf being so much better today than it was in the 50's, 60's or even the 70's.

Each decade has

brought new and better varieties of grass, safer and more effective pesticides and sophisticated mowers and supporting equipment.

A visit from the state DEP inspector several weeks ago made me think of the strides our industry has made in the last 30-odd years that I have been in the business. Not only have we made giant steps forward with our mowing and cultural practice equipment, and grass types, but more importantly, we have made even bigger steps in the use and application of pesticides. Superintendents have become environmental stewards and, as such, the players, workers and applicators are safer because of it. The environment, the non-golfing public, and our wildlife are in much less peril than back in the good old days.

I am most pleased that future generations of golf course workers will be less at risk because of some of the pesticides which were removed from the market. Furthermore, I am pleased that all the aforementioned non-golfers, wildlife, and the environment in general are also less at risk.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying everything we did back then was unsafe or wrong, but there is no doubt that where we are now is much better than where we were then.

Just think of how much more effective it is to spot-spray Sencor or Revolver for goose grass than to boom spray MSMA. How much better we are now that we apply pre-emergent herbicides for grassy and broadleaf weeds than to have to make all those post-emergent applications?

What a wonderful day it was when we could apply one fungicide to address all our fungal problems than to spray this for that and that for this, and on and on it went!

How much better off are we with grasses that tolerate 1/2-inch to 3/8-inch mowing heights