



Quarterly FSHS Newsletter

May 2026 • Volume 35 Issue 2

In this issue:

- 1 139th Annual Meeting & Conference Details
- 2 Message from the New Program Coordinator
- 3 River Tour Tickets Still Available
- 4 In-Service Training: Cover Crops, Compost, and Biochar in Sustainable Agriculture
- 5 Building Buzz: Extension Inspires Pollinator-Friendly Yards and Pollinator Census Participation
- 6 Sponsorship Incentive Program for Members
- 6 2025-2026 FSHS Board of Directors & Sectional Vice Presidents
- 6 FSHS Committee Chairs & Administrative Contacts

The 139th Annual Meeting of the Florida State Horticultural Society

The 139th Annual Meeting of the Florida State Horticultural Society will be held in happening downtown Jacksonville overlooking the St. Johns River! Join us and learn about the latest research and innovations in Florida horticulture!



When: June 7th to 9th, 2026

Where: **Hyatt Regency Riverfront, Jacksonville**

(225 East Coastline Drive, Jacksonville, FL 32202)

Links to register for the conference, reserve your hotel room, and other details can be found [here](#).

In addition to over 125 technical presentations, there will also be special programs (including an optional river boat tour), guest speakers, an in-service training, and evening receptions to get together with friends and colleagues.

We hope to see you there!

Message from the New Program Coordinator



Anna Mészáros

Extension Agent II, M.S. Commercial Horticulture & Vegetable Production Palm Beach County - SE
ameszaros@ufl.edu
(561) 233-1712



A lettuce field in Palm Beach County.

As our former Program Coordinator, German Sandoya, concluded five years of outstanding service and passed the torch, I am honored to step into this role and will do my best to serve the program over the next three years.

A little bit about myself: I am originally from **Hungary**, where I earned my MS in Horticultural Sciences from the University of Corvinus in Budapest (formerly known as the University of Horticulture), with a specialization in Integrated Pest Management focusing on Entomology. Building on that foundation, I spent a year in **France** where I completed a post-master's graduate program in Crop and Environmental Protection at the École Nationale Supérieure Agronomique de Montpellier (Montpellier SupAgro).

After moving to the **United States**, I joined the Louisiana State University AgCenter as a research and Extension associate in the Department of Entomology, where I worked on insect management in sugarcane, rice, and cotton. I later worked for a private agricultural consulting and research company, Pest Management Enterprises, conducting research on row-crop management. In 2016, I moved to Florida and joined Glades Crop Care, Inc. as a research scientist, conducting trials on vegetables and citrus. Since 2021, I have served as the **UF/IFAS Commercial Vegetable Production Extension Agent** in Palm Beach County, focusing on large-scale vegetable production, IPM, and food safety.

Palm Beach County produces vegetable crops on >80,000 acres, with an annual production valued at

more than \$400 million, making it the leading vegetable-producing county east of the Mississippi River. The county supplies a major share of the nation's winter vegetables, including sweet corn, lettuce, celery, radishes, cabbage, snap beans, bell peppers, and herbs. This production system is strongly shaped by soil type: in western Palm Beach County, rich organic muck soils support large-scale production of leafy vegetables and sweet corn, while eastern Palm



Anna scouting in a celery field.

Beach County relies on sandy soils better suited for high-value fruiting vegetables and specialty crops.

I work closely with large-scale growers, crop consultants, industry representatives, and UF/IFAS research faculty to develop applied research and Extension programs with a strong emphasis on rapid responses to invasive insect pests, integrated pest management, best water and fertilizer management practices, and food safety.

(Continued on page 3)

Program Coordinator....continued from page 2

These efforts generate practical, data-driven recommendations that are adopted by growers playing a key role in Florida's and the nation's fresh vegetable supply. I also serve as a conduit between UF/IFAS research faculty and some of Florida's largest vegetable producers, ensuring that research priorities reflect real-world challenges and deliver science-based solutions where they matter most.

Outside of my professional activities, I have a strong passion for botany and native plants. I enjoy plant and nature photography, hiking, and traveling to national parks, where I draw inspiration and strength to dive into the next busy production season. Travel also fuels my interest in exploring different cuisines, and I enjoy bringing those experiences home by cooking for family and friends.

As your new FSHS Program Coordinator, I would like to sincerely thank everyone who submitted abstracts this year. A special thank you goes to those who carefully followed the abstract submission guidelines; this greatly facilitates the work of our sectional vice presidents, editors, and myself, as well as the development of the meeting program book and Book of Abstracts.

This year, we have received 173 abstracts (134 oral and 39 poster presentations), including record numbers for poster presentations and student competitions. Student engagement has been exceptional, with 39 oral and 20 poster student competition entries. Due to the high number of entries, we will need volunteers to judge these oral and poster student competitions. **If you are interested in volunteering, please contact me at ameszaros@ufl.edu.**

More information on the poster sessions will be posted on the FSHS website soon, and sectional vice presidents will be reaching out to presenters in the coming days. Please remember to reserve your hotel room and register for the conference before June 1, when registration rates increase. While the farm tour is full, tickets are still available for the Monday evening river tour and will be available for purchase at the registration desk.

We are working hard to finalize the program and more details will be shared soon. We look forward to an outstanding meeting in Jacksonville. Our hotel is beautiful and will be a perfect setting for our meeting. Thank you all for your continued participation and support.

See you in Jacksonville!

Anna

River Tour Tickets Still Available



Tickets are still available for the Monday evening river tour!

Join us for a relaxing Monday evening on the water and experience Jacksonville from a unique perspective. Enjoy scenic views, great conversation, and a cash bar as the Jacksonville River Taxi cruises along the St. Johns River while the sun sets.

The **St. Johns River**, Florida's longest river, offers a fascinating glimpse into the region's natural beauty and history. Dolphins are frequently seen playing and feeding in its iconic black waters. Historically, Florida cattle once crossed the river at its narrowest point, earning the area the name Cowford before the city was founded. Today, murals of cattle painted on the Acosta Bridge commemorate Jacksonville's rich past and provide a stunning backdrop for this memorable sunset cruise.

Tickets can be purchased during the conference registration process. If you are already registered and did not have a chance to purchase a river tour ticket, **additional tickets will be available on-site at the registration desk (credit card only) until Monday at noon.**

Don't miss this opportunity to unwind, connect with colleagues, and enjoy one of Jacksonville's signature experiences.





Cover Crops, Compost, and Biochar in Sustainable Agriculture: Challenges and Opportunities (IST#34475)

June 9, 2026

1:20 pm - 4:30 pm

Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront,
225 East Coastline Drive,
Jacksonville, Florida, 32202

Topics and Presenters

1:20-1:30 pm Welcome and Introduction

Dr. Xiaoying Li and Stephen Jennewein

1:30-1:55 pm Optimizing row crop production with cover crops and meta-analytic evidence for biochar usage. Dr. Hardeep Singh

1:55-2:20pm Improving potted plant growth with engineered biochar and N-fixing bacteria. Dr. Jianjun Chen

2:20-2:45 pm On-farm trials assessing the integration of cover crops and biochar in subtropical organic vegetable production. Dr. Xiaoying Li

2:45-3:10 pm When cover crops and compost work and when they don't: what soil microbes tell us. Dr. Sarah Strauss

3:10-3:20 pm Break and coffee time

3:20-3:45 pm Compost and biochar: practical applications and real-world challenges. Dr. Mica McMillan

3:45-4:10 pm Mitigating freezing damage: enhancing specialty crop resilience through silicon nutrition Dr. Shahid Muhammad (special added session)

4:10-4:30 pm Extension agent-led discussion: agent perspective, stakeholder feedback, and future research needs. Stephen Jennewein

Registration

- ◆ UF IST#34475: This IST is held in conjunction with the Florida State Horticultural Society annual meeting.
- ◆ You must register as a FSHS meeting attendee www.fshs.org and on PDEC pdec.ifas.ufl.edu. This training will begin immediately following the Extension Luncheon.
- ◆ Travel funding is provided by the office of Dean for Extension and is limited to the first **20** registered agents (to cover hotel, meal, and mileage expenses for this training). The chartfield will be sent to all event participants after the event for reimbursement. With any questions, please contact Xiaoying Li / Stephen Jennewein via emails: xiaoying.li@ufl.edu or skiesareours@ufl.edu.
- ◆ Certified Crop Advisor CEUs will be applied upon request.

Building Buzz: Extension Inspires Pollinator-Friendly Yards and Pollinator Census Participation



By:
Tiare Saracino, UF/IFAS Extension, Hillsborough County, Seffner, FL
Caitlin Sollazzo, UF/IFAS Extension, Manatee County, Palmetto, FL
Jackie Lebouitz, UF/IFAS Extension, Sarasota County, Sarasota, FL

Across Florida, residents are coming together to celebrate and protect one of our state’s most important natural treasures—pollinators. From butterflies and bees to other beneficial insects, interest is growing as Extension professionals from multiple Southwest Florida counties teamed up to spark excitement for the Great Florida Pollinator Census and promote pollinator-friendly gardening.



Bee on rosinweed flower. Photo: Tia Saracino, UF/IFAS

In July 2025, UF/IFAS Extension faculty hosted a lively, 90-minute regional webinar that welcomed gardeners, homeowners, and nature enthusiasts eager to learn how small actions at home can make a big difference. Participants explored the incredible diversity of Florida’s pollinators, discovered easy ways to create welcoming habitats, and gained practical tips for using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to protect beneficial insects while managing pests. To help attendees put knowledge into action, the program also shared fun and useful resources like seed packets, stickers, IPM guides, and pollinator census materials.



The excitement didn’t stop when the webinar ended. Post-program feedback showed that participants left feeling more confident and inspired—nearly all reported learning something new, especially about the vital role insects play in Florida’s ecosystems. Even better, many committed to positive changes such as planting pollinator-friendly plants, sharing what they learned with others, practicing IPM, and joining citizen-science efforts like the Great Florida Pollinator Census.

A few months later, follow-up surveys revealed that enthusiasm had translated into real-world action. Most respondents reported taking at least one new step to support pollinators, proving that education paired with encouragement can lead to lasting impact. This district-wide collaboration highlights the power of teamwork and community engagement. By working together across county lines, Extension professionals were able to amplify their reach, inspire Floridians to care for pollinators, and strengthen participation in statewide conservation efforts. The buzz is growing—join the 2026 Census, scheduled for August 21–22.



For the census, you count the number of insect landings on a flowering plant for 15-minutes. Photo: Tia Saracino, UF/IFAS



Incentive Program for Members

It's never too early to approach a new sponsor for our annual meeting!

FSHS Annual Sponsorship Categories & Member Incentive

Bronze:	\$250	-	\$25 credit toward registration or member dues
Silver:	\$500	-	\$50 credit toward registration or member dues
Gold:	\$1000	-	\$100 credit toward registration or member dues
Platinum:	\$2000	-	\$200 credit toward registration or member dues
Diamond:	\$5000	-	\$500 credit toward registration or member dues



For more information, contact: Gene McAvoy, Sponsorship Chair gmcavoy@ufl.edu

FSHS Board of Directors

Board Chair: Prissy Fletcher
President: Manjul Dutt
President Elect: Carlene Chase
Secretary: John Chater
Treasurer: Tara Wade
Proceedings Editor: Ed Etxeberria



FSHS Sectional Vice Presidents

Citrus:

Vice President: Flavia Zambon
VP Elect: Caroline Tardivo

Ornamentals, Garden & Landscape:

Vice President: Julio Perez
VP Elect: Jeremy Rhoden

Handling & Processing:

Vice-President: Jiuxu Zhang
VP Elect: Uzman Khalil Chaudhry

Agritourism:

Vice President: Brittany Council-Morton VP Elect: Alissa Hevesh

Krome Memorial:

Vice President: Lisa Strange
VP Elect: Jugpreet Singh

Vegetables:

Vice President: Donna Arnold
VP Elect: Craig Frey

Agroecology/Natural Resources:

Vice President: Zack Brym
VP Elect: Lourdes Perez Cordero

FSHS Committee Chairs & Administrative Contacts

Program Coordinator: Anna Meszaros
Marketing/Social Media Coordinator: Tia Saracino
Membership Coordinator: Mark Bailey
IST Coordinator: Xiaoying Li
Sponsorship Coordinator: Gene McAvoy

Newsletter Editor: Alicia Lamborn
Board Member-at-Large: Craig Campbell
Board Member-at-Large: Richard Campbell
Student Affairs: David Austin
Poster Coordinator: Marguerite Beckford