

Promoting Ag Awareness through Commodity Fact Sheets¹

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Overview

Increasing public awareness of Florida agriculture is a vital step in motivating the public to support agriculture. Agricultural awareness and literacy also empower people to make informed decisions about agriculture and food policy. A basic understanding of the diversity of Florida's agricultural products, their impacts on the economy and the environment, and their availability contributes to Extension's mission to sustain and enhance quality of life.

The Initiative 1, Priority 3 Team of the Florida Extension Roadmap is tasked with promoting public awareness of agriculture in order ultimately to increase awareness and appreciation of food systems and the environment. A definition of Ag Awareness and an initial report of Florida Ag Awareness efforts can be found in EDIS publication AEC504, *Understanding Ag Awareness Programming throughout UF/IFAS Extension: Supporting Citizen Awareness of Food Systems and the Environment* (Rumble, Stofer, & Johnson 2016). To assist Extension professionals with these efforts, we are developing a number of tools to enhance awareness. Here we discuss the first tool, a set of fact sheets highlighting key Florida agricultural commodities.

This publication outlines a series of fact sheets with infographics related to specific Florida agricultural commodities. Infographics are "graphic visual representation[s]

of information, data or knowledge intended to clarify and integrate difficult information quickly and clearly," (Siricharoen, 2013, p. 54). The fact sheets are intended to be visually appealing while presenting an overview of the commodity and its role in Florida agriculture. They are a concrete way to help citizens understand the abstract concept of agriculture.

These fact sheets were graciously developed by a number of Extension professionals with expertise on the commodities. The Ag Awareness Priority Team reviewed each fact sheet and made small revisions. The [initial list of commodities](#) is in the Posters/Fact Sheets section of the UF/IFAS Communication branding web site; additional commodities will be added as time and expertise permit.

Format

Each fact sheet is laid out in a similar fashion. See Figure 1 for an example on watermelons.

Typical elements include a short write-up about the commodity, an availability chart for seasonal fresh produce showing the times of the year when the majority of the crop is harvested in Florida, and a state map illustrating counties where production of the commodity occurs, based on the USDA's most current Census of Agriculture. The data highlights the number of farms per county according

1. This document is AEC591, one of a series of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date June 2016. Revised January 2020 and April 2023. Visit the EDIS website at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> for the currently supported version of this publication.

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to the Census of Agriculture. The maps do not provide detailed insight into each county's agricultural production, but rather an overview of production. As a result, some counties with fewer, larger producers may seem underrepresented compared to others with more, smaller producers. Also, counties where data is underreported to the USDA may have more production than is represented on the map.

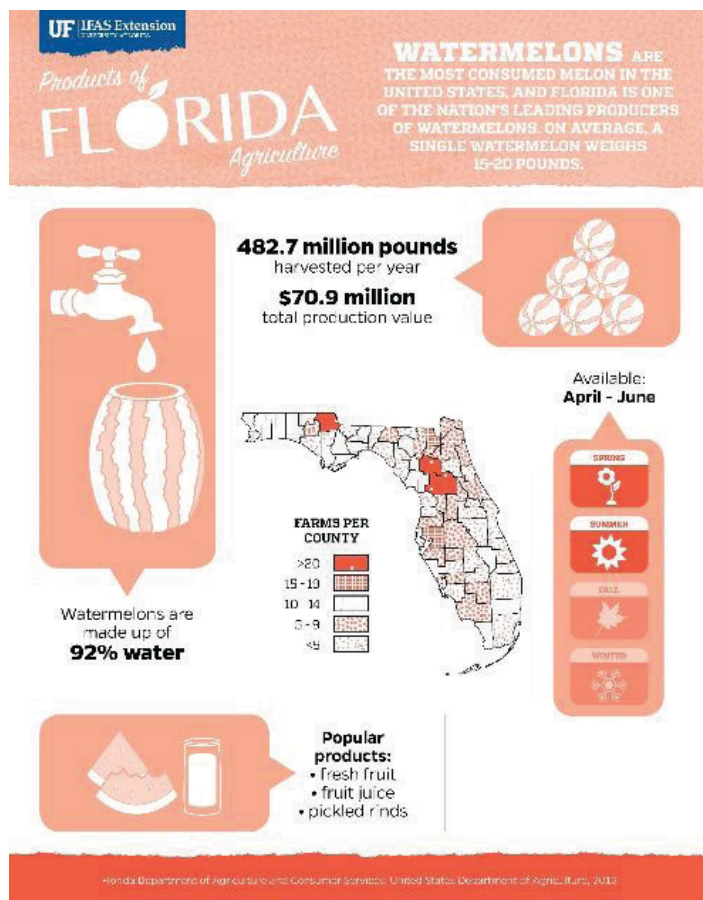


Figure 1. Watermelon fact sheet to support Ag Awareness Efforts.
Credits: UF/IFAS

The other two sections contain either information about environmental impacts of production, fun facts about the products derived from the commodity, nutrition and health information, or examples of products made from the commodity.

We provided an estimate of the total annual production and total annual economic value. These are based on the latest currently available statistics at the time of publication. These fact sheets will be updated periodically.

Modifying with County-Specific Information

The fact sheets are designed to allow for customization with local information. Specifically, an editable box is provided in the bottom right hand corner to include local contact

information. The flyers are intentionally one-sided for Extension professionals who may wish to add a back side with county-specific information.

Particular ways the fact sheets could be enhanced or combined with other resources:

- Include specific “you-pick/U-pick” or agritourism operations that feature the commodity.
- Include recipes that use the commodity.
- Include events that might promote use of the commodity, such as canning of fruits and vegetables.
- Combine with existing fun facts or activity sheets related to the commodity.

Recommendations for Use

These flyers are intended for use in almost all Extension programs. Extension professionals are encouraged to take these fact sheets and alter them to include additional information specific to their counties or regions. Then you can link to, print, post, and share the sheets in a variety of ways.

Some suggested ways to distribute these fact sheets include the following:

- Link to downloadable pdf files on county web sites.
- Create clickable webpages from the flyers to connect to county content.
- Print copies for handouts in county offices.
- Distribute at farmers’ markets, fairs, farm tours, field days, Farm to School programs, school visits, Farm City events, Legislative days, and other county events.
- Mail a copy with newsletters.
- Provide sets to teachers or other educators.
- Provide county-, region-, or commodity-specific sets to legislators.
 - For example, an all fruits and vegetables set, an all specialty crops set, an all animal products set, and an all products for your county set.
- Display as posters in Extension facilities.
- Share with producers for distribution.

Evaluating Ag Awareness

The purpose of these fact sheets is to increase public agricultural awareness, including the following:

- Increase knowledge of Florida agricultural products and their availability.
- Increase knowledge of the contributions of Florida agriculture to our environment, quality of life, and the economy.
- Increase appreciation of Florida agriculture.

The impacts of increased public agricultural awareness and literacy include greater public support of agriculture, including use of Florida agricultural products and participation in agritourism; informed decision-making on agricultural policy; and increased participation in agricultural careers.

In addition to recording the numbers of flyers distributed or downloaded per commodity, audience, and location, we would like to track the ways in which Extension professionals use these fact sheets. Finally, in particular, we are interested in stories about how these fact sheets were used that may not be reflected in simple numbers or surveys of their use. Please refer to the Ag Awareness Team's [plan of action](#) for additional information about the specific metrics with which we are measuring ag awareness.

Conclusion

Participants in many Extension programs may learn about agriculture, whether or not the program is intentionally designed to enhance agricultural awareness. Using simple graphic tools, such as these fact sheets, can make agricultural and food systems education easy and straightforward for Extension professionals and their audiences. Finally, these sheets can provide tangible, contextualized, timely, and relevant information to consumers to enhance their quality of life.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Yvette Goodiel and a number of other agents for work producing, curating, and updating these fact sheets. The authors thank UF/IFAS Communications for graphic design.

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