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FSA News of Immediate Importance – Deadlines!



An early season hurricane can cause tremendous damage to corn and other crops in the U.S. southeast.

Sign-up for USDA 2005 Hurricane Disaster Programs To End on March 30th

The deadline to sign up for USDA's 2005 Hurricane Disaster Programs is **March 30th**. Administered by the FSA, these programs offer financial assistance to producers in certain counties who suffered losses due to Hurricanes Katrina, Ophelia, Rita or Wilma in 2005. In Florida, 37 counties – and contiguous counties – are eligible for assistance as a result of damage. (Counties declared disaster areas because of Hurricane Dennis are not eligible.)

USDA has \$2.8 billion to

assist victims of the 2005 hurricane season and \$1.2 billion of those funds are available through disaster programs. Program fact sheets, a list of eligible counties and program details can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov by clicking on “Disaster Assistance Programs.” One can also call the FSA state office in Gainesville for assistance (352) 379-4562. To receive benefits, producers must meet particular eligibility requirements.

Programs

Livestock Compensation – for certain feed losses.

Livestock Indemnity (II) – for certain livestock deaths.

Citrus – for crop production losses and fruit bearing tree damage, including clean-up

Fruit & Vegetable – for fruit and vegetable crop production losses, including clean-up

Tropical Fruit – for tropical fruit production losses (carambola, mangos, etc.)

Nurseries – for losses to ornamental nursery/fernery producers, including clean-up

Tree Assistance – for commercially grown trees, bushes and shrubs, and vines



The FSA office in Deland, Florida was destroyed by the turbulent “Groundhog Day” weather system. FSA relocated to Tavares and was up-and-running the following day. (Tim Manning photo)

Groundhog Day Tornadoes: USDA Offers Low-Interest Emergency Loans

Farmers that suffered significant damage from the “Groundhog Day” storms February 1-2, 2007 may apply for 3.75 percent Emergency Loans from the FSA.

Eligible farmers can use the money to overcome physical losses, such as repair and rebuilding farm buildings, clean up debris or prepare land for replanting, and to replace livestock, supplies or harvested crops that were lost. The money can also be applied to recover a portion of losses on growing crops that were destroyed.

Four central Florida counties – Lake, Seminole, Sumter and Volusia – were recently named presidential major disaster declaration areas. Affected eligible producers in these and in contiguous counties may apply for these loans. Applications are due in county FSA offices by **October 3, 2007**.

Volusia County was also declared a Presidential Major Disaster area on February 8 as a result of the severe storms, tornadoes and flooding on December 25, 2006. Volusia and contiguous counties producers have until **October 9, 2007** to submit Emergency Loan applications.

For information on disaster assistance, contact a local USDA Service Center or FSA office, or visit USDA's website at <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov/>.



Thankfully, devastating storms do not hit Florida every year. When they do, state and federal governments have a variety of assistance programs to help producers get back on their feet.

Tree Assistance Sign-Up Deadline

Commercial tree owners whose trees were lost or damaged in 2005 hurricanes and whose properties are in eligible primary or contiguous counties can sign up for the 2005 Hurricanes Tree Assistance Program through **March 30**. The USDA program provides payments to eligible owners of commercially grown trees, bushes (including shrubs) and vines grown in the field that were lost or damaged because of 2005 hurricanes Katrina, Ophelia, Rita or Wilma. (The Act does not include counties declared disaster areas by Hurricane Dennis.)

To sign-up, eligible tree owners should contact their FSA office or USDA Service Center. The USDA will require producers to provide documentation to receive payments; however, USDA understands that some producers may have little documentation due to hurricane devastation. Producers may not receive benefits if they already received payments made under other federal programs for the same losses.

A Tree Assistance fact sheet including a list of eligible counties in each state is available on-line at www.fsa.usda.gov along with other disaster program information. Click on “Disaster Assistance Programs.”

Federal Tobacco Transition Payments to Florida Will Total \$8.3 Million

The USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation is issuing more than \$8.3 million to Florida tobacco producers, quota holders and other contract holders through the Tobacco Transition Payment Program (TTPP), the "tobacco buy-out." Tobacco buy-out payments began on January 16, 2007 and total \$950 million nationwide.

"The end of the federal tobacco program marks a new beginning for growers and quota holders, and these annual payments play an important role in that transition to the free market," says Kevin L. Kelley, Executive Director for the USDA's Farm Service Agency in Florida.

The American Jobs Creation Act (the Act), effective with the 2005 crop, included the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act. It ends the federal tobacco marketing quota and price support loan programs that had existed since the 1930s. It also provides annual payments, beginning in 2005 and ending in 2014 to assist in the transition to the open market. Payments and program costs are derived from assessments on tobacco manufacturers and importers.



Under the Tobacco Transition Payment or "Tobacco Buy-Out Program," the federal government is ceasing its tobacco market intervention system of quotas and price supports.

The TTPP fact sheet provides eligibility guidelines and payment rates. It is available on-line at www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/ttpp05.pdf under "TTPP." The TTPP web site can be found at www.fsa.usda.gov; click on "Tobacco."

Florida's First Annual SART Conference

With the Florida SART Conference coming up in just a couple months, a preliminary agenda has been published. Here are its tentative highlights:

Wednesday beginning at 1:00 pm

Welcome and Opening Remarks (Dr. Tom Holt, Tim Manning, Joan Dusky)
Past, Present and Future of SART (Greg Christy, Tim Manning, Joan Dusky)
Safety of SART Field Responders (Tom Ackerman)
Management Perspectives (Craig Fugate or designee)
The Terrorist/Criminal Threat (Peter Chalk)

Thursday beginning at 8:00 am

On Thursday, the conference breaks into three distinct sessions with these featured

speakers and presenters, and others to be determined:

- A. Animal & Plant Issues (Paul Gibbs, Amanda Hodges, Ann Wildman, Richard Miranda, Lara Bevan, Raquel Aluisy, Bill Armstrong, John Haven and Kathleen Hartman)
- B. Security & Field Response (Art Wade, David Perry, Tom Ackerman, Daron Swearinges and Travis Kelley)
- C. Incident Command (Lee Newsome)

Luncheon with Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Charles Bronson

Outdoor demonstration of SART vehicles and equipment

Sessions resume at 2:00 pm and continue until 5:00 pm

Friday beginning at 8:00 am

Managing Critical Incident and Post-Incident Stress

Regional Domestic Security Taskforce Operations (Art Johnstone)

The State of SART Programs Nationwide (Liz Wang, John Haven, David Perry)

Role of the Florida State Emergency Board (Kevin Kelly, Tim Manning)

Establishing a County SART (Liz Wang, Travis Kelley, Bill Armstrong)

Conference Evaluation and Closing (Dr. Tom Holt, Tim Manning, Joan Dusky)

To recap, set aside Wednesday, May 30 to Friday June 1, 2007 to attend the Florida SART Conference at the TradeWinds Island Grand Resort in St. Petersburg Beach. It has been scheduled at the start of hurricane season and to encourage family attendance. Advance room rates are less than \$100/night. County SART personnel are especially invited and encouraged to attend.

For further details and to go to the registration forms, just point your cursor at: www.flsart.org/calendar/stateconference.htm. We look forward to conferencing with you at the TradeWinds in May!

New Training Module on Sample Submissions

The newest SART Training Module, titled "Quality and Secure Plant and Animal Sample Submissions" is available at <http://www.flsart.org/library/index.htm#PD7>.

Prepared by Amanda Hodges of the Southern Plant Diagnostic Network, UF, and Rick Sapp, Florida SART Technical Writer, the purpose of the "Sample Submission" training module is to introduce the proper handling, packing and shipping of diseased or invasive plants and threatening or unusual insects for physical security and identification by Florida laboratories. The training module will not only teach about proper handling, packing and shipping, but it shows why these are important skills and then gives laboratory contact information.

- We know that Florida is threatened in numerous ways, for instance:
- Soybean rust, for instance, probably arrived on the winds of Hurricane Ivan in November 2004 and has now spread into a dozen neighboring states.
 - Kudzu vines were intentionally planted by gardeners, farmers and ... yes, agricultural specialists ... and have, at various times been welcomed for

erosion control and animal feed. (Even experts make mistakes!)

- Citrus greening is spread by a tiny moth-like creature called a *psyllid*, which carries the bacteria causing this enormously disruptive disease in Florida citrus. Greening may also be spread via seeds and grafts from infected plants.

The purpose of the new module is also to give readers or participants in training sessions the confidence that, should they discover something unusual on their farm, ranch or even in their suburban yard, they can collect good quality samples, and receive accurate information on dealing with the perceived problem.



Exotic Update: What's in your yard?



I grew up on Amelia Island and, as a youngster, spent practically as much time at my grandparent's home in downtown Fernandina as I did at my mom and dad's place near the lighthouse on the highest point of that island. At grandma's I would climb the chinaberry tree (to throw its green berries at my cousins), and water the variegated lantana and simply marvel at the enormous, lavender wisteria vine. Raised on a farm near Chipley, grandma's biological sensitivities had evolved beyond pulling up any grass or shrub that dared turn green in her yard, and sweeping the dirt with a broom.

She and I had no idea her favorite yard plants – not the pink flowering azalea

Berries of the exotic invasive Chinaberry tree are hard and green before they ripen. Grandma's tree was perfect for climbing and picking berries to throw at cousins.

and the giant lavender hydrangea blossoms – were non-native, invasive exotics. Of course, roses, oranges and tomatoes are also non-native exotics, but they will not thrive in Florida without active human assistance. Our chinaberry, lantana and Chinese wisteria, were different.

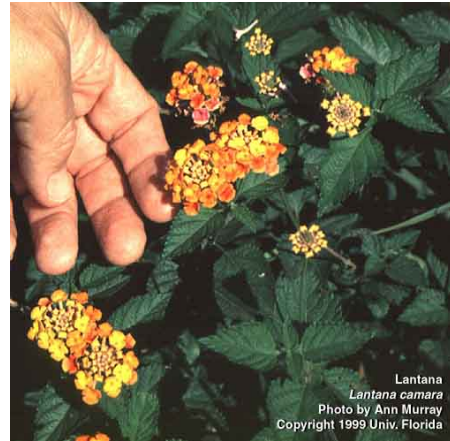
An invasive plant is a non-native species that has escaped cultivation, spreading on its own and causing environmental or economic harm. We had no idea! A country girl at heart, grandma believed every home place needed its own Chinaberry tree.

Nevertheless, invasive non-native plants outgrow, replace and destroy native plants. Non-natives usually do not have natural enemies, the diseases, insects and other environmental stresses that control their spread.

Chinaberry: An Asian native, the tree grows fast, spread along fence lines and in disturbed areas by fruit-eating birds. It outgrows, shades-out and displaces native vegetation; bark, leaves and seeds are poisonous to domestic animals and small children.

Lantana: IFAS scientists consider this colorful flowering plant a “serious, world-wide invader that ... has altered habitats and threatens to eliminate native populations of plants and animals.” It flowers year-round, is exceptionally hardy, has hybridized with native lantana and its berries can be highly toxic.

Chinese wisteria: There is much information on the Internet about Chinese wisteria, but you can still purchase it from nurseries. Gardeners say it “responds well” to pruning, but a drive through any southern town in late spring will introduce you to several of these plants crawling over the street, thick on overhead telephone or electrical lines.



Everyone in our neighborhood grew lantana, and it would have surprised and disappointed my grandmother that the plant was a non-native, environmentally damaging species.



Looking up at grandma's Chinese wisteria, I imagined Jack climbing the beanstalk. Lavender spring flowers cascade so beautifully around it that it is hard to picture as a noxious weed.

For additional information about exotic plants and animals in Florida, please refer to these valuable web resources:

- Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants – USF at www.plantatlas.usf.edu
 - Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants – IFAS, UF at <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/>
 - Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Invasive Plant Management at www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/invaspec/index.htm
 - Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council at www.fleppc.org
 - Florida Natural Areas Inventory – FSU at www.fnai.org
 - The Institute for Regional Conservation at www.regionalconservation.org
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About the SART Sentinel

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If you have a story or photo that you would like to have considered for publication in *The SART SENTINEL*, please contact the Editors.