

Annual Meeting of NCAC-4: Horticultural Crops

Hosted by the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

November 3-5, 2021

Meeting notes:

The University of Florida hosted the 2021 meeting of the NCAC-4 group on the Gainesville, FL campus on November 3 - 5. Nine NCAC-4 members attended the in-person meeting. Present for the meeting: Leo Lombardini (University of Georgia); Desmond Layne (Auburn University); Justin Moss (Oklahoma State University); Jeff Iles (Iowa State University); Vance Baird (Michigan State University); Amit Dhingra (Texas A&M University); Thayne Montague (Texas Tech University); John Erwin (University of Maryland); and Frank Louws (North Carolina State University).

The meeting began with an informal gathering at Wilmot Botanical Gardens on the UF campus. Ms. Leah Diehl provided an overview of the Horticultural Therapy Program at UF for attendees. Day two began with speakers who focus on lessons learned from COVID. Dr. Damian Adams, IFAS Associate Dean for Research and Associate Director of the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, provided an overview on how IFAS responded to the COVID shutdown and how his office led and managed the resumption of research activities. Data on resumption activities were provided for departments, research and education centers, and schools. Dr. Adams also provided resumption data based on faculty rank and gender. Dr. Ernesto Escoto, Director of the UF Counseling and Wellness Center, provided an overview on how COVID impacted student populations. He outlined impacts to his counselling staff and provided data on national trends in student mental health issues. Dr. Heidi Radunovich, Associate Professor in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, provided information on health and wellness for stakeholder populations. She gave descriptions of her work in Extension programming on stress and stress reduction techniques. The afternoon was devoted to on-campus tours. Attendees toured the Alan and Cathy Hitchcock Field and Fork Pantry and the Field and Fork production area on the UF campus. Tours also highlighted the new IFAS Growth Chamber Facility. Lastly, attendees visited the IFAS Honeybee Research and Extension Lab. During the final day, attendees heard from faculty and staff in the Environmental Horticulture Department. Dr. Gail Hansen and Dr. Kevin Begcy described how they modified their teaching program in response to the COVID shutdown and pivot to fully on-line teaching. Ms. Danae Perry, Plant Sciences Program Academic Advisor, also gave a perspective on the impacts of COVID on academic program student support services and mental health. Lastly, Mr. Jason Lee, Owner and CEO of SkyFrog Landscaping, provided an industry overview on how COVID impacted the industry and what the long-term impacts are likely to be from a horticultural business perspective.

In NCAC-4 group business, it was decided to include a few new items in our state reporting (startup package amounts for new faculty hires; text boxes to describe new initiatives – what worked, and what didn't from a unit leader's point of view). State reporting will commence before the end of the year. In closing the meeting, Dr. Leo Lombardini assumed the chair position for the group. He will host the next meeting at the University of Georgia in the summer of 2022. Dr. Desmond Layne agreed to chair the following year.