

My Florida Farm Weather Puts Water Management in Growers Hands

Weather-related information is essential to Florida's agricultural producers for making important decisions regarding the use water for irrigation scheduling and cold protection. Growers rely primarily on FAWN weather data and tools to plan for irrigation and freeze protection, and FAWN has been proven very useful in helping growers save both water and dollars – IFAS estimates show use of FAWN tools on cold nights can potentially generate savings of millions of dollars and billions of gallons of water. However, some farms can be many miles from a FAWN site. Therefore, FAWN may not provide the level of specificity needed to ensure growers are operating their irrigation systems during optimal times. In a collaborative project titled My Florida Farm Weather, FAWN is working with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Office of Agricultural Water Policy to deploy a high-resolution farm based basic weather station network with the goal of providing growers with site-specific weather data that can be used to maximize water use for irrigation and cold protection. Growers enrolled in FDACS Best Management Practices are eligible to participate in the program, and can choose from among several companies that have been approved by FAWN and FDACS to install the weather stations. Each weather station measures air and dew point temperatures, wind speed and direction, relative humidity, and rainfall amount, and is eligible for up to 5 additional temperature sensors to be installed in other locations on the property.

Data are collected every 15 minutes and displayed on a webpage that shows data from the farm-based stations on an interactive Google Map. Users can select a station to view all available data as well as location information about the station. Currently, approximately 140 farmer-owned weather stations are on-line in the first 14 months of existence with more to come. Growers will be able to use their weather data in FAWN freeze protection and irrigation scheduling tools to save water.