

CARES Recipient Profile



THIS FARM
CARES

Farm: Straughn Farms, LLC

Location: Waldo, Windsor & Archer, Alachua County

Date of Origination: 1968

Commodities: Blueberries and watermelons



Alto Straughn has farmed all his life and in 1982, after much research, he purchased a bankrupt dairy farm in Alachua County and converted the land to blueberry production.

Starting with 25 acres, Straughn worked closely with researchers from the University of Florida to test new varieties and determine best production practices. Now, with 700 acres of berries, it's clear that the collaboration was very beneficial for both Straughn and the University's program.

Having continuously grown watermelons across the state since 1968, Alto has witnessed changes in water regulations for Florida's farmers. Anticipating more, he researched ways to modify his growing methods for conservation, efficiency and productivity. One of the first farmers in the state to grow melons using drip tape and plastic mulch, he applied that technology to his blueberries. Later, he installed a pulse pumping system which delivers a small amount of pH-balanced water and nutrients numerous times a day, virtually eliminating any leaching into the soil.

Looking for ways to reduce agriculture's draw on the aquifer, Straughn's research led him to "high tunnels." Typically covering a quarter-acre, each high tunnel raises the ambient air temperature substantially, thus keeping it warmer longer. Not only did this reduce the need to pump water for freeze protection, it reduced, by about 50%, the water previously needed to nourish and protect the plants.

Today, Straughn's Waldo, Windsor and Archer farms in Alachua County cover more than 2,000 acres and are going strong. When asked what he enjoyed most about farming, Mr. Straughn shared, "I enjoy the challenge of creating something dynamic and watching it thrive."

Source: FreshFromFlorida.com – 2011