

CARES Recipient Profile



THIS FARM
CARES

Farm: Sun City Tree Farm

Location: Hillsborough County

Date of Origination: 1988

Commodities: trees



Sun City Tree Farm is owned and operated by brothers J.C. and Eric Tort, who have demonstrated that conservation efforts can readily go hand-in-hand with economic interests as they have expanded their tree farm from five to 150 acres over the past 16 years while implementing innovative practices that have significantly reduced water usage.

The Torts' many innovations range from developing a clamp and tether system that keeps trees from falling over in high winds while preventing injury to the trees, to adapting a root bag system that saves water by allowing tree roots to draw water from the ground.

Currently, 80% of their stock of approximately 100,000 trees is grown above ground in cloth bags as part of that root bag system, helping the Torts maximize the value of their plants while reducing the costs of fertilizer, weed control chemicals, fuel, irrigation, and labor. Trees grown in bags also show a faster rate of growth and are easily removed from the field for transport. An economic analysis of Sun City done by UF-IFAS several years ago found it to be one of the most efficient tree farms in the state.

Trees are also closely monitored for nutrient and moisture levels that allow for precision application of water and slow release fertilizer. To limit the amounts of chemical controls needed, trees are routinely inspected for insect pests and spot treated only as needed.

Another part of Sun City's operation is a second site of 20 acres that is irrigated solely by surface water from rain and storm water collected in a two-acre storage pond. The farm uses grass walkways between tree rows to increase the infiltration of rainwater and prevent soil compaction while also reducing the need for herbicides. Around the farm's first site, a windbreak of trees was planted to create shelter for birds and other wildlife, while the second site is encircled by six acres of vegetative buffer to maintain natural habitat.

Recycling is a regular part of the farm's routine, with even the cloth root bags reused as protective wrap on tree trunks during transport.

When asked why he is a farmer who CARES, Eric said "the greatest reward is when other growers, walk onto our farm and compliment us about our operation. After all our hard work, this is the best thing we can hear."

Source: FreshFromFlorida.com – 2007