

CARES Recipient Profile



THIS FARM
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Farm: West Coast Tomatoes, LLC

Location: Manatee County

Date of Origination: 1980s

Commodities: Round and Roma Tomatoes



For nearly 40 years Gary Reeder has dedicated his career to growing fresh market tomatoes on the 1,800 acre farm owned by West Coast Tomatoes, LLC in Duette, Florida.

Farm #4, where Reeder operates, produces over 60,000,000 pounds of tomatoes annually. However, maximum yields are not the only priority to Reeder. He is also intentional about the conservation of land and its natural resources.

Reeder has been implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) since they began. BMPs are practical, cost-effective actions that agricultural producers can take to conserve water and reduce the amount of pesticides, fertilizers, animal waste and other pollutants entering our water resources. BMPs are designed to benefit water quality and water conservation while maintaining or even enhancing agricultural production. According to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, over 12 billion gallons of water is conserved each year through the implementation of BMPs.

“Every drop of water we use costs us money. It is in our best interest to only use what the plants truly need in order to not waste two things: water and money.”

Reeder utilizes seepage irrigation throughout the entire farm. This permits the water table to reach the roots and activate fertilizers as needed. By pulling regular soil samples, Reeder is able to tell how effective his irrigation system is operating and where he may need to adjust the water levels.

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Other BMPs that Reeder implements are grass waterways and retention areas. These prevent very little irrigated water from leaving the farm. Being able to house all of their irrigated water on the farm ensure excess fertilizer nutrients will not runoff. With Florida's limestone base it is easy for nutrient- filled water to permeate through the limestone and into the aquifer. Reeder well recognizes this fact and works to eliminate this from occurring.

Reeder currently serves as the President of Manatee County Farm Bureau. Through that role, he shares that he is committed to inviting local 4- H and FFA members out to his farm to teach them about all of the BMPs and practices he utilizes. Educating local citizens about how their food is produced is what Reeder says is a most meaningful part of his job. Reeder also serves on the State Advisory Committee for Florida Fruit/ Vegetables. In 2017, Reeder received the 4R Advocates Nutrient Stewardship Award. To date, only 25 farmers have been selected for this prestigious honor. It is important to Reeder to be involved in local and state agencies that support farmers by hosting researchers from the University of Florida/ Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) on the farm throughout the last four decades. He feels their research in new methods for fumigation, irrigation, pest control and even fertilization ultimately help not only his farm but all farms.

"Environmental stewardship, to us, is very important because this is the only land we have left. We have to take care of it and what is surrounding it. What happens on this farm is reflected on what happens away from it. There are only so many places in this county that can raise this kind and quality of tomatoes." Reeder said.

