

CONNECTIONS



MISSION

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education conducts and disseminates objective interdisciplinary research and educational programs to increase public understanding of and engagement in agricultural and natural resources issues.



UF MULE BARN, 1939

In the early 1900's the UF Mule Barn was constructed on the outskirts of campus to house livestock and agricultural equipment.

IFAS BUILDING 60, 2021

Nearly 100 years later, the Barn has become the PIE Center's new home, connecting us to the rich history of UF/IFAS.

VISION

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education will be the preeminent research and education organization on the social science perspectives of agricultural and natural issues to promote a more informed and engaged public.



DR. SCOTT ANGLE



UF/IFAS VICE PRESIDENT

The past year has been an experience in humility as COVID-19 revealed how fragile our food system is.

To learn from rather than just lament that experience, we need to examine where and why the breakdowns occurred. UF/IFAS is fortunate to have the PIE Center to do it. It is nonpareil in interpreting the story of Florida agriculture and natural resources and digging for the story behind the story, where the wisdom lies.

Lauri Baker, Christa Court and Angie Lindsey have done a lot of digging this year with the support of a grant from the USDA-NIFA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative. "Lessons from COVID-19: Positioning Regional Food Supply Chains for Future Pandemics, Natural Disasters and Human-made Crises" delves into where the most vulnerable links in our food chain are and how we can make them more resilient against future shocks.

And there will be future shocks. We're in the heart of hurricane season as I write this. COVID is still with us and affecting trade and travel. It's not a question of if, it's a question of when.

The PIE Center's move to Sabal Palm Drive and new facilities and equipment for monitoring attention, reaction and sentiment will tell us more than ever what's on people's minds. Again, we've seen over the past year how perceptions can be formed based on multiple sources of information, not all of them credible.

What the PIE Center delivers is credibility. That's because it has the expertise to bring objectivity to the matter of subjectivity. Its important work is one of our best hopes of learning a lesson the first time something happens and responding more effectively when it happens again.

Sincerely,

Scott Angle
Vice President

DR. RICKY TELG



PIE CENTER DIRECTOR

As our team looks to the future, we know it is important to be creative and innovative in all of our endeavors. This year, we contributed to exciting new projects that have helped us forge connections with stakeholders, researchers and the general public. Our numerous research initiatives and continued collaborations with partner programs demonstrate our team's diverse skillset and commitment to producing high-quality social science research and outreach materials.

Our new podcast, Science by the Slice, offers a platform for scientists across the country to discuss pressing issues, such as COVID-19 and mental health in agriculture. Social science experts from the PIE Center contribute to the conversation by providing information on how people make decisions related to these issues.

Understanding how media impacts the public's decision-making process is vital to our work as a center. We are excited to partner with stakeholders throughout the state to use perception analyzer dials to gather second-by-second perceptions. If you are interested in partnering with us to use this new technology, please reach out to me.

Our team has been innovative with how we have addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the agriculture and natural resources sectors. Angie Lindsey worked quickly to connect 80 Extension professionals and agricultural leaders with mental health first aid training after we learned of the mental health impacts of the pandemic. Lauri Baker has been working with the Center for Rural Enterprise Engagement (CREE) to investigate how the pandemic impacted farm and food supply chains. This research will help communities better prepare for future disruptions to the food supply chain.

The PIE Center continues to work with the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS), serving on the project's Outreach Core. As COVID-19

vaccines were introduced at the end of 2020, the PIE Center and SCCAHS partnered with UF Health to develop vaccine communication resources to address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation, including a comprehensive vaccine communication toolkit. The PIE Center continues to play a prominent role on the Outreach Core as the team develops a grant renewal strategy that will provide extended support for the SCCAHS and PIE Center to address issues related to agricultural health and safety.

The unprecedented events of the past year have prompted the PIE Center to be responsive to emerging research and outreach needs, especially those that are close to home. The PIE Center received a request from UF/IFAS Vice President Scott Angle to conduct research to understand the perspective of agricultural producers related to best management practices (BMPs) and the Clean Waterways Act (Senate Bill [SB] 712). Faculty and staff responded swiftly to conduct a statewide producer survey and three focus groups with UF/IFAS Extension faculty in early 2021. Among the major findings, results indicated a need to update BMP research and to enhance educational materials.

The PIE Center also provided key insights to UF/IFAS administration as they plan for the future of UF/IFAS and UF/IFAS Extension. Our team conducted listening sessions and focus groups to provide data to help develop the next Florida Extension Roadmap, as well as collect public perceptions of UF/IFAS to assist in IFAS's new strategic planning process.

In addition to serving our agricultural and natural resources stakeholders, the PIE Center continues to serve the discipline of agricultural communications by mentoring up-and-coming communicators through internships and graduate assistantships. Investing in our students secures a promising future for the field of social sciences.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our center has demonstrated the ability to adapt and overcome. Our efforts in research, outreach and education have allowed us to connect with individuals around the nation. We look forward to expanding these connections and reaching new horizons in the coming years.

Sincerely,

Ricky Telg
Director and Professor

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UNDERSTANDING FLORIDIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF HEMP CULTIVATION

By *Valentina Castano*

The PIE Center's recent research to understand public perceptions of industrial hemp will inform the development of communication materials to educate Floridians about hemp cultivation.

Industrial hemp is a plant cultivated as a fiber and grain crop with uses in textiles, oils and building materials. To support future sustainability of the hemp industry in Florida, the UF/IFAS Industrial Hemp Pilot Project was initiated in 2019.

UF assistant professor of agroecology Zack Brym serves as a project coordinator for the UF/IFAS Industrial Hemp Pilot Project.

"I noticed the impactful social science research and educational materials coming out of the PIE Center early on in my orientation at UF/IFAS, and I was inspired to find ways to work together," Brym said.

Brym assisted the PIE Center in developing a public opinion survey to understand the public's current knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of hemp. The PIE Center will continue working with Brym to learn about producers' experiences with hemp cultivation in the future.

"Integrating social science early on with agricultural research surrounding a new crop is critical," Brym said. "We don't yet know how the public and industry will accept and adopt hemp cultivation, but the work with the PIE Center will help us follow along. Communications and community development are critical aspects of a new crop introduction."



STUDYING: M.S., Agricultural Education & Communication
PROJECTS: SCCAHS, graphic design, videography
WITH PIE SINCE: 2019

VALENTINA CASTANO
GRADUATE ASSISTANT

RESEARCH

Forging connections with academic institutions, organizations and communities while researching issues in agriculture & natural resources.



\$6,789,870

IN RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

8

SURVEYS

9

INTERVIEWS

16

FOCUS GROUPS

22

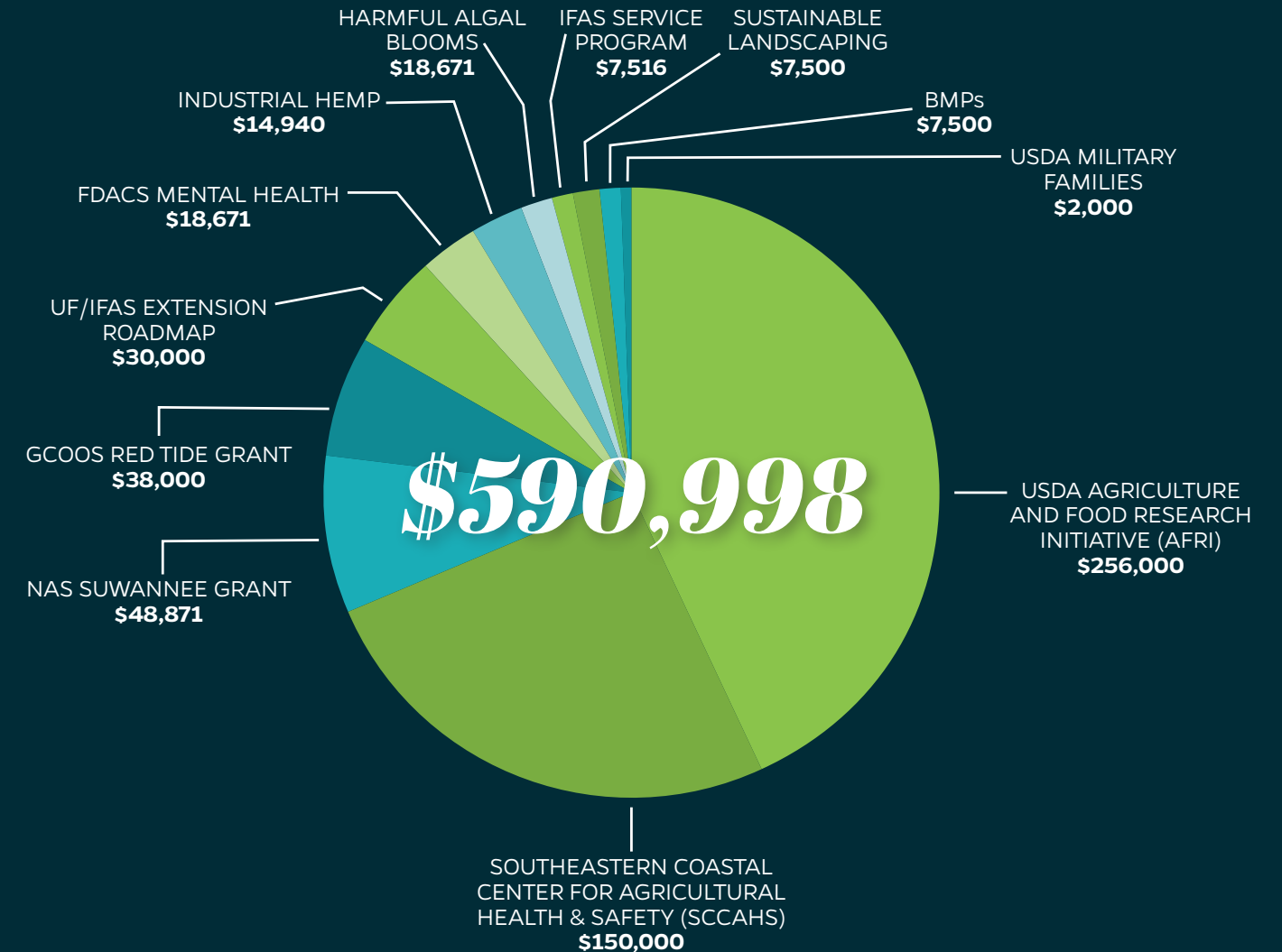
JOURNAL ARTICLES

38

*EDIS PUBLICATIONS

*EDIS: UF/IFAS Electronic Data Information Source

RESEARCH DOLLARS AWARDED TO THE PIE CENTER IN 2020/2021





UNDERSTANDING THE FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

By *Michaela Kandzer*

In response to disruptions to food supply chains caused by COVID-19, the PIE Center collaborated with the Center for Rural Enterprise Engagement (CREE) to conduct research on positioning regional food supply chains for future pandemics, natural disasters and human-made crises.

The research project was one of 17 projects nationwide to receive funding through a new program area of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). The program promotes

rapid response solutions to the pandemic through applied research, education and extension activities.

The project's goal was to assess the impact of COVID-19 on farm and food supply chain operations by understanding consumers' behavioral responses regionally and across the U.S. Researchers wanted to understand the capacities and structural vulnerabilities of regional food systems to support population needs, develop resources and strategies for current and future disruptions with supply



DR. LAURI BAKER
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

chain stakeholders and offer training programs for university cooperative extension personnel to strengthen support for local and regional supply chain participants during times of disruption.

Lauri Baker, associate professor of agricultural education and communication, and PIE Center research coordinator Anissa Zagonel have been leading this project.

"This project has been a great way to bring together researchers from universities across the United States," Baker said. "This type of interdisciplinary research has allowed us to better assess the perceptions and needs of producers in the U.S."

The project has brought together five universities from three regions of the country: the North Central region, the Southeast region and the Southwest region. The universities that represent these regions are the University of Minnesota, Kansas State University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Florida and University of California-Irvine.

Over the course of this project, researchers conducted surveys and an environmental scan, held three webinars and worked to disseminate the results with the public. Surveys examined how producers adapted to shorter, regional supply chains during COVID-19.

An online survey was implemented across three USDA regions in the United States. Data for the first survey were collected from Feb. 1 to April 15, 2021. The second survey is still collecting data.

Findings from the first survey indicated that 43% of respondents perceived a relative advantage to adopting

EDUCATION: Ph.D., Agricultural Education & Communication
RESEARCH: CREE, new media technologies, online marketing, extension communication
WITH PIE SINCE: 2019

a shorter supply chain during COVID-19. Nearly 54% of respondents indicated that shorter, regional supply chains aligned with their businesses and personal values. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that the transition to a shorter supply chain was complex.

When respondents were asked about their ability to observe others transitioning to a shorter, regional supply chain, only 19% of respondents indicated being able to observe. When asked about top sources of information related to shorter, regional supply chains, respondents indicated that their top sources were commodity/grower/industry associations, friends or family members and neighbors and community members.

"Being able to provide information and insight on how the regional food supply chains can be more resilient in the future in the event of another disaster, whether it be a major weather event or another pandemic, is really important," Zagonel said. "If we are able to do this, then this project will be a success."

The team plans to create training programs for university cooperative extension personnel, conduct additional webinars, create and distribute fact sheets highlighting research efforts and produce additional resources focused on the lessons learned from COVID-19.

"We are excited for the future of this project," Baker said. "We have several other data collection, deliverables, presentations and trainings planned for the remainder of this project."

To learn more about this project, visit: <https://ruralengagement.org/lessons-from-covid-19/>.



ANISSA ZAGONEL
RESEARCH COORDINATOR

EDUCATION: M.S., Communication & Agricultural Education
PROJECTS: Instrument design, data collection, program evaluation, academic writing
WITH PIE SINCE: 2021

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN COASTAL COMMUNITIES

By Sydney Honeycutt

Issues such as red tide and climate change pose serious threats to the natural resources that draw millions of visitors to Florida each year. To address the impacts of these issues, the PIE Center has collaborated on grant projects to integrate research results with coastal communities through strategic messaging and educational components.

The Gulf Coast Ocean Observatory System (GCOOS) Assessment of the Short- and Long-Term Socioeconomic Impacts of Florida's 2017-2019 Red Tide Event has utilized the PIE Center's strengths in disseminating research on important natural resources issues. The goal of the GCOOS project is to understand the societal impacts of harmful algal blooms (HABs), more commonly known as red tide events, caused by the single-celled organism *Karenia brevis*.

The PIE Center has worked closely on this project with Christa Court, assistant professor of regional economics



EDUCATION: M.S., Natural Resource & Environmental Economics
PROJECTS: Instrument design, data collection, program evaluation, academic writing
WITH PIE SINCE: 2014

SANDRA ANDERSON
 RESEARCH COORDINATOR

at the University of Florida and director of the Economic Impact Analysis Program.

"The scope and intensity of recent HAB events in Florida has increased public awareness of these events and their associated socioeconomic impacts," Court said. "A more complete understanding of the socioeconomic impacts of HABs is critical to an informed decision-making process related to strategies for mitigating or preventing HABs or the impacts of HABs at the local, state and federal levels."

Throughout the two-year project, the PIE Center will conduct a series of six focus groups to measure the public's perceptions, attitudes and knowledge of HABs. PIE Center research coordinator Sandra Anderson has led the development of the focus groups for the GCOOS project.

"A common theme in all three groups was the high level of concern about harmful algae blooms (HABs) and the effect of having another HAB event like the one that occurred in 2018," Anderson said. "Participants from all the groups also expressed an interest in wanting to know more information about HABs before, during and after an event."

Using the data from the focus groups, the PIE Center will develop a communication and outreach toolkit during the project's second year. The toolkit will include informational print pieces, infographics and a webinar targeted towards UF/IFAS Extension faculty to promote the materials for use in Extension programming.

"The PIE Center has played the vital role of connecting the project to the affected communities, gathering perspectives and insights on how these events have impacted their lives and livelihoods as well as valuable input and feedback on research directions," Court said.

The PIE Center has fulfilled a similar role in a project focused on coastal ecosystems in the Suwannee River region. The NAS Ecological and Economic Impacts of Land Use and Climate Change on Coastal Food Webs and Fisheries project aims to understand the influence



Assistant professor Angie Lindsey leads a discussion with committee members about the NAS project.

of future climate and environmental issues on natural resources and communities.

The NAS project is led by Michael Allen, UF professor of fisheries and aquatic science and director of the UF/IFAS Nature Coast Biological Station.

"The biggest threat to natural resources in the Suwannee River basin results from expected changes in freshwater quality and quantity that result from climate change and human use of land and water," Allen said. "This challenge will influence all aspects of life in the Suwannee River basin and associated estuary. Understanding how best management practices can mitigate these impacts is critical for sustaining productive agriculture, forestry, fisheries and wildlife in our region."

In April 2021, the PIE Center hosted the first committee meeting and focus group for the project in Cedar Key, Florida. A discussion was facilitated to understand local

stakeholders' perceptions of environmental, economic and community issues in the Suwannee River region. Data will be used to inform the development of public surveys and further research.

"The PIE Center brings expertise in communicating science to the public. Faculty and staff at the PIE Center are experts at integrating public input into complex research projects," Allen said. "The result will hopefully be better management of natural systems in the future."



STUDYING: M.S., Family, Youth & Community Sciences
PROJECTS: NAS grant, graphic design, outreach, social media
WITH PIE SINCE: 2018

SYDNEY HONEYCUTT
 GRADUATE ASSISTANT



OUTREACH

Connecting important research results to citizens and communities throughout Florida and across the United States.

PREPARING FLORIDIANS FOR DISASTERS *By Alena Poulin*

The PIE Center is helping Floridians prepare for natural disasters through a recent collaboration to update a comprehensive homeowner's handbook.

Along with the Florida Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) and Florida Sea Grant, the PIE Center helped update the "Florida Homeowner's Handbook to Prepare for Natural Disasters."

The handbook provides state-specific information and covers an overview of coastal natural hazards, the disaster declaration and recovery process, emergency plans and ways to protect your property and finances.

"This is a very comprehensive 'go to' resource for Florida communities," said Florida EDEN point of contact Angie Lindsey. "It covers many different natural disaster topics and provides state resources all in one easy-to-locate book. This eliminates trying to search for what to do and who to call, which is very beneficial after a disaster when power, cell service and internet may be down."

Regularly updating the information in the handbook is necessary to ensure residents receive the most current resources.

"Although much of the information in the original book was relevant, it was important for us to go through the book and ensure all resources were listed correctly, check web addresses, phone numbers and contacts, and ensure that any new tools and best management practices were included in the book," Lindsey said.

The handbook is now available for purchase from the UF/IFAS Extension Bookstore. It is also free to download as a pdf at bit.ly/FloridaHomeownersHandbook.



STUDYING: M.S., Mass Communication
PROJECTS: EDEN, graphic design, event planning, content creation
WITH PIE SINCE: 2019

ALENA POULIN
MARKETING ASSISTANT

2,237

EMAIL SUBSCRIBERS

18,930

WEBSITE VIEWS

950

PODCAST LISTENERS

14

AWARDS

2,758

FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

1,563

TWITTER FOLLOWERS

696

INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS

ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE IN AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND LIFE AND HUMAN SCIENCES (ACE) CONFERENCE AWARDS:

SILVER AWARD

Harmful Algal Bloom Campaign

SCCAHS COVID-19 Crisis Communication for Extension & Agricultural Workers

BRONZE AWARD

State of the Science Mental Health White Paper

Together: 2019/2020 PIE Center Annual Report

COVID-19 Educational Video with Glenn Morris

RISING STAR AWARD

Ashley McLeod-Morin

EQUIPPING COMMUNITIES WITH VACCINE COMMUNICATION TOOLS

By Ashley McLeod-Morin

When the Food and Drug Administration granted emergency use authorization for COVID-19 vaccines, the PIE Center worked with the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS) to develop effective communication tools regarding COVID-19 vaccination for agricultural communities.

“Like other resources developed by the PIE Center, we developed a COVID-19 vaccine communication toolkit

based on extensive social science research,” said PIE Center communications coordinator Ashley McLeod-Morin. “The PIE Center had already proactively begun research on what people thought about the COVID-19 vaccine and what concerns hesitant groups had.”

In January 2021, nearly 70% of respondents in a PIE Center survey indicated their intent to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. However, the remaining 30% were either unsure or did not intend to receive the vaccine.

Factors that prevented respondents from intending to receive the vaccine included potential risks, associated costs and concerns related to insurance coverage. Respondents were also influenced by unknown long-term risks and their trust in pharmaceutical companies.

“By better understanding the public’s concerns, we were better able to focus on the most relevant information related to the vaccine,” McLeod-Morin said.

The PIE Center, in partnership with SCCAHS and UF Health, developed a comprehensive communication

toolkit that provided information related to the COVID-19 vaccines. The toolkit included social media content, information sheets, a guest news template, and best communication practices. Many of the materials were translated to Spanish, Haitian Creole and Vietnamese to best serve the diverse population that works in agriculture, fishing and forestry.

“It was a priority to develop communication resources about the vaccine that used credible information that also appealed to individuals who work in agriculture and live in rural communities,” McLeod-Morin said. “We know that many communication campaigns are not always developed with these audiences in mind so we felt this was a gap we could help fill.”

These resources were used by commodity groups and Extension professionals throughout the Southeast, with more than 1,000 visits to the online tools.

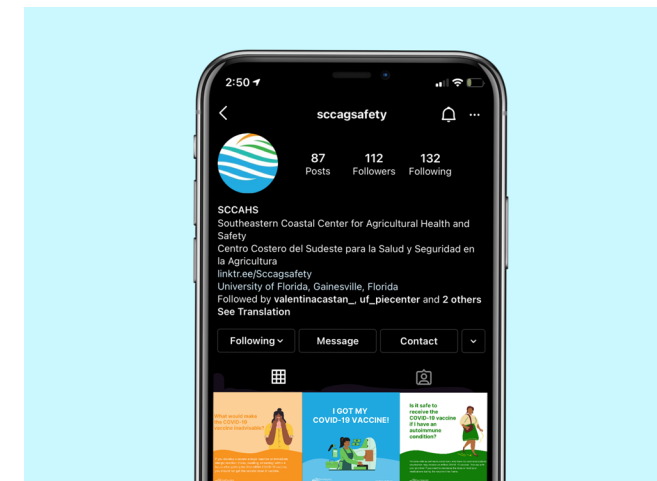
The communication resources focused on the safety and access to the vaccine, including frequent questions related to the vaccine and questions related to allergies, pregnancy and compromised immune systems.

After the toolkit was released, the PIE Center remained responsive to the needs of individuals in rural and agricultural communities.

“Initially, we were only translating the resources to Spanish and Haitian Creole and then we heard from Extension agents in the Southeast that resources available in Vietnamese were a need, so we worked to address that gap,” McLeod-Morin said.

The PIE Center and SCCAHS also promoted vaccine clinics as the vaccine became available to more people.

“The PIE Center was able to leverage our relationships with county Extension programs and agricultural commodity groups to promote vaccine events in rural, agricultural communities,” McLeod-Morin said. “At some of these events, we were even able to provide informational handouts and stickers.”



The PIE Center and SCCAHS supported communities beyond agricultural stakeholders. As part of the UF Health community working groups focused on vaccine hesitancy, the PIE Center and SCCAHS provided church fans that were requested by pastors in low-income areas of the Gainesville community. The church fans had information about the COVID-19 vaccine printed on them, which allowed the fans to serve as an informational tool.

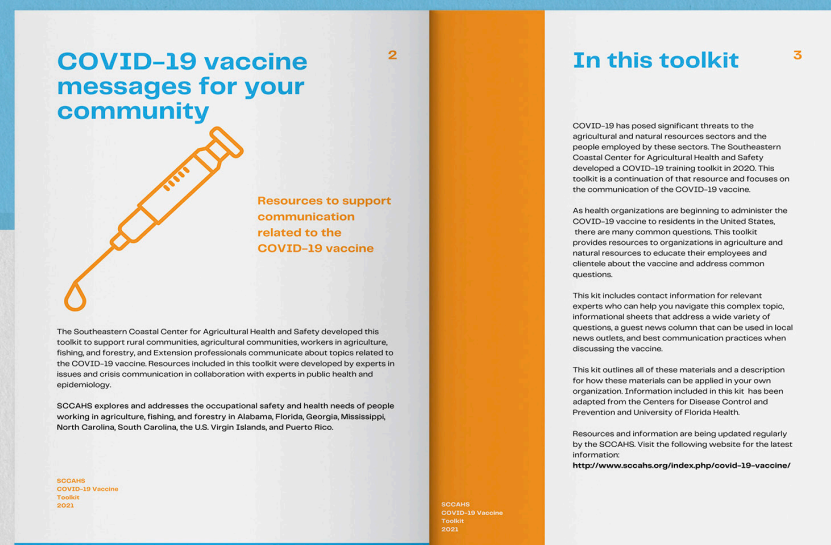
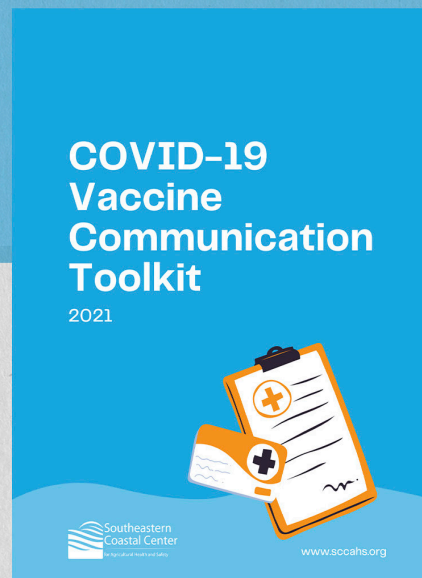
“Providing hand fans to churches in the community is a notable example of innovatively addressing an information need in under-served areas of the community and I am happy that our centers could help address this need,” McLeod-Morin said.

To access vaccine communication tools from the SCCAHS, visit <http://www.sccaahs.org/index.php/covid-19-vaccine/>.



STUDYING: Ph.D., Agricultural Education & Communication
PROJECTS: SCCAHS, social media, outreach, print design, news writing
WITH PIE SINCE: 2016

ASHLEY MCLEOD-MORIN
 COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR



SCIENCE BY THE SLICE

A NEW PODCAST FOR AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

By **Michaela Kandzer**

As digital platforms become increasingly popular, the PIE Center launched a new podcast, Science by the Slice, to connect with diverse audiences and explore the science behind issues in public health, agriculture and natural resources.

The first series of Science by the Slice aired in January 2020 and highlighted innovative research about COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccine. Since January, five series of the podcast have been shared and streamed by 950 podcast listeners.

Science by the Slice allows listeners to peek behind the scenes of academic research while learning about

important topics affecting the agriculture and natural resources sectors. Each month, a new series focused on a topic in agriculture or natural resources is released. Each series consists of two episodes, each episode featuring a knowledgeable guest.

“It’s been really fun creating episodes for Science by the Slice and diving into a variety of topics with such tremendous guest experts,” said PIE Center education coordinator Phillip Stokes. “While I absolutely want our listeners to learn information about each topic we cover, I also hope that our approach makes people think about these subjects differently than how they may currently view them, enhancing their understanding of many complex issues in agriculture and natural resources.”

Guest speakers on the podcast discuss the science of complex challenges in society. Through analysis and storytelling, guests piece together the motivations that reveal the way people think about, form and act on opinions regarding these pivotal issues. Special guests have included scientists, industry experts, agricultural producers, university faculty and PIE Center staff.

“Being a guest on Science by the Slice, challenged and caused me to reflect on our business in ways that the day to day doesn’t always allow,” said PIE Center advisory board member and owner of Dasher Farm, Sarah Carte.



PHILLIP STOKES
EDUCATION COORDINATOR

EDUCATION: M.S., Geography, Global & Environmental Change
PROJECTS: Trainings, curriculum, education, outreach, podcast
WITH PIE SINCE: 2015



Education coordinator Phillip Stokes talks with Michelle Miller from The Farm Babe for an upcoming podcast episode.

“It also provided a comfortable platform to talk about the challenges and wins for the agriculture industry in an uncertain time in our lives, that I would not have had otherwise.”

Diverse guest speakers on the podcast have educated listeners on numerous topics including COVID-19, hemp production in Florida, hurricane preparedness, rural mental health and heat-related illnesses.

“I have enjoyed learning from all of our guests, but I found the discussion with Marshal Sewell on the topic of rural mental health the most inspiring,” said PIE Center communications specialist Michaela Kandzer. “Marshal shared his heart-wrenching experience with his father struggling with mental health and promoted messages of the importance of mental health resources in rural communities. This is an important topic that needs to be discussed.”

The podcast can be found on the PIE Center website, or be streamed on multiple platforms, including Spotify, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts and Amazon Music.

“The PIE Center works to educate and engage the public on issues that relate to agriculture and natural resources,” Kandzer said, “and with our new podcast, Science by the Slice, we are trying to do just that.”

To listen and subscribe to Science by the Slice, visit: <https://piecenter.com/media/podcast/>.



MICHAELA KANDZER
COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

EDUCATION: M.S., Agricultural Education & Communication
PROJECTS: Graphic design, outreach, social media, podcast
WITH PIE SINCE: 2018

LEARNING BY DOING

PIE CENTER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Ashley McLeod-Morin

The PIE Center collectively works to inform stakeholders about issues that impact agriculture and natural resources, but faculty, staff and students at the PIE Center also recognize the need to continually learn to be able to best serve the agricultural and natural resources sectors.

Faculty, staff and students with the PIE Center participated in many professional development programs over the last year focused on podcasting, statistical analysis, graphic design and video production.

Sydney Honeycutt, a graduate assistant with the PIE Center, hosted a professional development session for the team where she provided training on After Effects and kinetic typography.

“The professional development sessions allowed me to learn new skills and get hands-on practice with those skills,” said PIE Center media intern Aly Morrison.

Another graduate student with the PIE Center, Valentina Castano, partnered with communications coordinator Ashley McLeod-Morin to provide training related to graphic design, using free tools. The training program allowed attendees to create personalized Zoom backgrounds.

Education coordinator Phillip Stokes and communications specialist Michaela Kandzer provided valuable training related to podcasting. Attendees learned to record quality audio and edit audio together.

These training courses allowed the entire PIE Center team to gain skills in areas they may not always work in.



STUDYING: M.S., Animal Sciences
PROJECTS: Graphic design, videography, content creation
WITH PIE SINCE: 2021

ALY MORRISON
MEDIA INTERN



EDUCATION

Educating individuals, organizations and communities to connect them with agriculture and natural resources issues.

41

WORKSHOPS, TRAININGS
& PRESENTATIONS

21

WEBINARS HOSTED

11,549

VIDEO VIEWS

604.9

HOURS OF WATCH TIME

7

PART-TIME JOBS

8
VIDEOS
PRODUCED

A NEW SPACE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

By Alena Poulin

With limited spaces designated for social science research in Gainesville, the PIE Center opened the UF/IFAS Social Science Research Lab to serve as a location for focus groups, workshops and collaboration among social scientists.

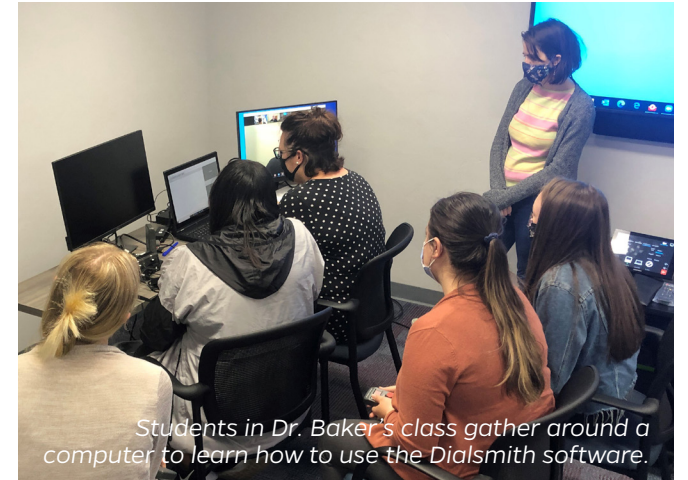
“The new lab space will provide the PIE Center with enhanced capacity to conduct social science research in North Central Florida,” said PIE Center director Ricky Telg. “With ample parking in this part of campus, it would become the leading space at the university for focus group and other social science research.”

A critical component of equipping the lab was the purchase of Dialsmith perception analyzer technology. The dials can collect continuous moment-to-moment feedback in real-time as focus group participants interact with content ranging from pre-recorded videos to live public speeches.

By collecting data continuously from participants throughout their entire interaction with the materials, researchers can pinpoint critical points in the stimuli that are impactful to the audience.

During the 2021 Summer C semester at UF, associate professor of agricultural education and communication Lauri Baker taught a class in the Social Science Research Lab that focused on using perception dials to do research on topics related to agriculture.

Throughout the course, students learned how to use the perception dial software. They also designed and carried out a research study using the dials to examine the level



Students in Dr. Baker's class gather around a computer to learn how to use the Dialsmith software.

of trust college students had for various messages and message sources related to the COVID-19 vaccine.

“This research project allowed us to test different messages and see how the content affected participants’ perceptions of the vaccine,” said AEC graduate student Valentina Castano. “We also learned about platforms that students deemed trustworthy or untrustworthy when learning about the vaccine. This information is important because it can help scientists and science communicators understand how these messages impact students’ decisions to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.”

Although the class has ended, work continues to write up and publish the findings and use what was learned about best practices to create a blueprint for future PIE Center research using perception dials.



EDUCATION: Ph.D. Human Resource Development/ Distance Education
RESEARCH: Agricultural communication, distance education
WITH PIE SINCE: 2014

DR. RICKY TELG
DIRECTOR, PROFESSOR



LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

FOSTERING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

By *Valentina Castano*

Mental health has become a growing concern among farmers and rural communities. Through outreach and educational efforts, the PIE Center has initiated important conversations about rural mental health in order to spread awareness and connect individuals with resources.

In May 2021, the PIE Center launched a series with the Science by the Slice podcast focused on rural mental health. Marshal Sewell, a field sales representative for Bayer Crop Science and the son of a strawberry producer, joined the PIE Center on the first episode of the series.

During harvest season of Sewell's senior year, his family's strawberry crop succumbed to anthracnose, a disease that prevents crops from absorbing nutrients in the soil. This event led to a complete loss of the harvest and cost the family their entire crop investment. The next morning, Sewell's father made the decision to take his own life.

"I remember my mom telling me, after it all happened, that it's up to us to decide what we make of the situation," Sewell said. "We can sit around and let it build up or we can try and do something with it."

While Sewell has seen efforts to improve access to mental health resources in rural areas, he believes real change will come from resources tailored to the specific issues experienced among rural and farm worker populations, such as concerns about fluctuating crop prices, trade deals and weather issues.

"We work in an industry that is so dictated by the environment, weather, trade and tariffs," Sewell said. "A lot of the time, it is completely outside our control."

Sewell hopes the topic of mental health will become destigmatized as more people discuss their battles with mental health and as others actively listen to those who have struggled.

The impacts of mental health in rural areas extend beyond those in the farming profession. Individuals who experience natural disasters, such as hurricanes or floods, are susceptible to facing mental health concerns.

Angie Lindsey, University of Florida assistant professor of family, youth and community sciences and UF's point of contact for the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN), frequently works with communities that have been affected by natural disasters.

"After Hurricane Irma, as the point of contact for EDEN, a lot of Extension agents were contacting me for

resources," Lindsey said. "One of the things I was getting requests for was mental health resources."

Lindsey heard stories of Extension agents who checked on farmers and stakeholders after the storm and learned some of these individuals were suffering severe mental health impacts after their properties were extremely damaged. She recalls Extension agents feeling unequipped to handle mental health crises.

"Luckily, I worked just a few doors down from Heidi Radunovich who is a clinical psychologist," Lindsey said. "I needed her help."

UF FYCS associate professor Heidi Radunovich worked with Lindsey to make mental health resources available to communities in need. After Hurricane Irma, the two created Disaster Mental Health Workshops which included the National Council of Behavioral Health's Mental Health First-Aid Program.

Most recently, Lindsey worked with the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS) to provide Mental Health First Aid Training to 80 Extension professionals and agricultural employees throughout the southeast.

"COVID-19 has created additional challenges for Extension agents," Lindsey said. "The online Mental Health First-Aid trainings were created as another avenue for Extension agents to learn about mental health and be better prepared to serve communities in need."



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RESEARCH: EDEN, disaster preparedness & recovery, community resources
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