

**CENTER FOR
PUBLIC ISSUES EDUCATION
IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



Letter from the Director Ricky Telg

I am excited to share the PIE Center's efforts and accomplishments for the 2024-2025 year. Throughout this report you will meet new PIE Center faculty, staff and students and learn about the efforts the PIE Center has made during the 2024-2025 year. We welcomed two new staff members (Annabel Henson and Karlibeth Leitheiser) and two internal faculty members (Erica Odera and Ashley McLeod-Morin).

Alongside our partner programs, the PIE Center has published a total of 24 articles and EDIS documents and won 19 research and communications awards.

The PIE Center was chosen to lead a statewide study that will gather the perspectives and experiences of the stakeholders and communities that IFAS serves. We are excited about this opportunity, and more information is available on the following pages. In addition to our statewide study, our team developed new outreach materials to help educate the public on how to best apply fertilizer and created fact sheets to address misinformation around bird flu (H5N1) for the public and backyard flock owners.

After reading this annual report, I hope you see how the PIE Center's outreach efforts and research play an important role in Florida's agricultural and natural resource sectors.



Letter from UF/IFAS Senior Vice President Scott Angle



The PIE Center plays several critical roles in the excellence of UF/IFAS. It elevates our national reputation. It contributes to our stakeholders' satisfaction. It also contributes important social science to our research, teaching and Extension.

I'm excited that Optimizing IFAS will do all three. Read on in the pages that follow for a feature about this initiative that my CFO and I asked Dr. Ricky Telg to undertake. But in short, it's listening in a scientific way to what our stakeholders have to say.

In 2024-25, the center received national recognition from the Association for Communication Excellence, the National Agricultural Communications Symposium, and the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education. With the PIE Center's deep engagement with Florida stakeholders in the coming year, it's my hope that it will be recognized once again, this time by Floridians who see firsthand the value of the PIE Center's work through the direct engagement of Optimizing IFAS.

Acknowledgements

Editors

Annabel Henson
Ricky Telg

Designer

Annabel Henson

Photography

IFAS Communications
PIE Center students and staff
Tom Wright

Writers

Mackenzie Atkins
Kayla Braggs
Annabel Henson
Karlibeth Leitheiser
Dorcas Sunday



Storm clouds over a South Florida landscape represent the extreme weather campaign recently launched by the PIE Center.

Photo Credit: Tom Wright

PIE Center directs statewide study

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) is conducting a multi-year study to examine the perceived public value of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) in Florida.

The study, called “Optimizing IFAS,” aims to gather perspectives and experiences of stakeholders and communities that IFAS serves.

PIE Center director Ricky Telg visited over 20 agricultural and natural resource associations in Florida over summer 2025 to discuss this project and how their voices can be heard.

Goals

SHORT-TERM GOAL

deeply understand the perspectives and experiences of the stakeholders and communities IFAS serves, to determine current and future issues of importance, and to establish measurement tools to facilitate longitudinal research in these areas.

MEDIUM-TERM GOAL

promote the voice of Floridians, to create dialogue and communication feedback loops, and to promote general awareness of IFAS through communication/marketing strategies.

LONG-TERM GOAL

create a positive cycle of information and dialogue between IFAS leadership and Floridians to promote responsive decision-making and advance public awareness and education about IFAS.

“This project will make explicit the needs and preferences of Floridians and track these areas over time,” said Erica Odera, PIE Center associate scientist. “We are asking Floridians to imagine the future they desire for the state, how they would prioritize issues, and the value they see IFAS providing for everyone in Florida.”

“At its heart, this study is one of policy learning and policy responsiveness. The voices of Floridians are the catalyst of this process.”

Research will be gathered through literature reviews, focus groups, interviews, online surveys and analysis of online trend data. The initial project started in early 2025 and will continue through 2026.

Take our survey by visiting:
piecenter.com/optimizing-ifas/
or scan the QR code below.



53,434
Page views

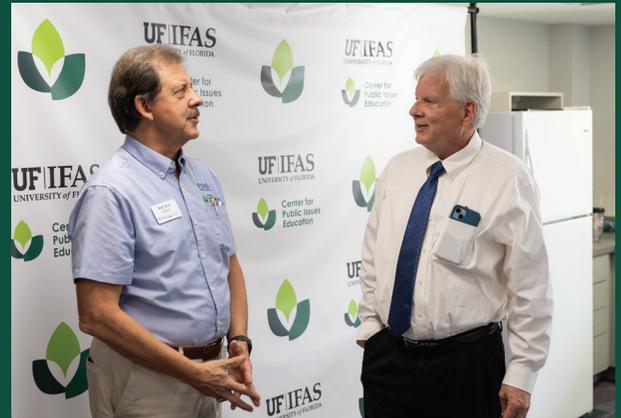


1,567
Email subscribers



5,400
Video views

UF/IFAS Mowry Road Show



Ricky Telg (L) and Scott Angle (R) engage in discussion at the 2024 UF/IFAS Mowry Road Show.

In November 2024, the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources participated in the UF/IFAS Mowry Road show.

The PIE Center showcased recent research projects, funding totals and publication highlights through poster displays. Attendees also stopped by a photo station with a branded backdrop and selfie props to share on social media.

A highlight of the event was the pie raffle, with pumpkin, apple and cherry pies. Visitors took home trail mix bags featuring PIE-branded M&Ms, pie dessert servers and informational rack cards about the center and its partner programs. Faculty, staff and students were on hand to answer questions and greet guests.

Extension faculty using Florida EDEN resources

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) partners with the Florida Extension Disaster Education Network (Florida EDEN) to develop resources to help Extension educators communicate with their communities about disasters.

Florida EDEN provides tools, training and direct support for Extension faculty working in affected areas throughout the state.

Florida EDEN's work extends beyond immediate response. Through the Images of Recovery Project, Florida EDEN, the PIE Center and the UF/IFAS Economic Impact Analysis Program are documenting the hurricane recovery process in agricultural communities. Community members and residents contribute photos of hurricane recovery.

"These images, paired with economic data, will shape tools and resources that will meet gaps and needs in communities working through recovery," said Angie Lindsey, Florida EDEN Point of Contact.

The project will produce an Images of Recovery economic report, fact sheets with maps and data and an online publication on project results and outcomes. Toolkits and social media pieces will equip Extension faculty to reach local audiences, while in-service trainings, webinars, and connections with partners around the state will strengthen Extension faculty's response to disasters, she said.

Florida EDEN offers other resources, such as the Hurricane Readiness video series, which helps prepare Floridians for hurricanes, fact sheets, social media toolkits and mental health training.

Together, these resources not only provide immediate support but also foster long-term recovery and resilience in Florida's agricultural communities, Lindsey said.

To access these and other Florida EDEN resources, visit piecenter.com/fl-eden/

Q&A

with UF/IFAS Extension Faculty

Q: How has Florida EDEN supported your efforts?

"The (EDEN) network has been extremely helpful in helping us with coordinating preparation and recovery efforts, some help with volunteer assignments, and general check-ins that helped with media requests."



Mike S. Allen

Director
UF/IFAS Nature Coast Biological Station

"Dr. Angie Lindsey and the Florida EDEN team have been an incredible support, ensuring I had a direct connection to timely information. The videos and fact sheets from FL EDEN were ready to share on social media or distribute at recovery sites."



Heather Futch

Program County Extension Agent III
County Extension Director
UF/IFAS Extension Columbia County

Q: How do you apply FL EDEN resources in your work?

"We share the Florida EDEN resources on preparedness with producers and small farmers, as well as the local EOC (emergency operations center), as part of our regular programming and collaboration. I also reference the resources when I write blogs and articles and share them with the farmers that participate in the SW FL Small Farmers Network."



David Outerbridge

Program County Extension Agent II
County Extension Director
UF/IFAS Extension Lee County

PIE CENTER FOLLOWER COUNT:



2,836

UF/IFAS Center for Public
Issues Education



1,662

@thePIECenter



903

@uf_piecenter



210

UF/IFAS Center for Public
Issues Education

PIE Center develops nutrient management glossary

To support understanding and adoption of soil nutrient management recommendations, the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) partnered with the UF/IFAS Department of Agronomy to develop a glossary of site-specific nutrient management (SSNM) terms.

The project explored the barriers and challenges in language use and contentious terms related to best management practices (BMPs). PIE Center researchers led focus groups and interviews with Extension agents, government agencies and external stakeholders; conducted surveys with certified crop advisors; and conducted an environmental scan of online resources.

Lauri Baker, agricultural education and communication professor and PIE Center researcher, said, “This project allowed us to gain insights from stakeholders on challenging terminology when discussing BMPs and to develop a tool to help bridge the gaps in understanding within soil nutrient management and BMPs.”

The glossary was developed by generating a relevant word list to identify terms through a review of all Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) BMP manuals, USDA reports about precision agriculture, and the UF/IFAS request for proposals statement for the SSNM block grant. These terms were defined using FDACS and federal government reports and reviewed for consistency by a team of four nutrient management Extension and research professionals.

Focus groups and interviews were used to gather feedback on the glossary and broaden the scope of terms used when discussing BMPs. Participants said the glossary would help promote consistent language across Florida, allowing agencies to “speak the same language.”

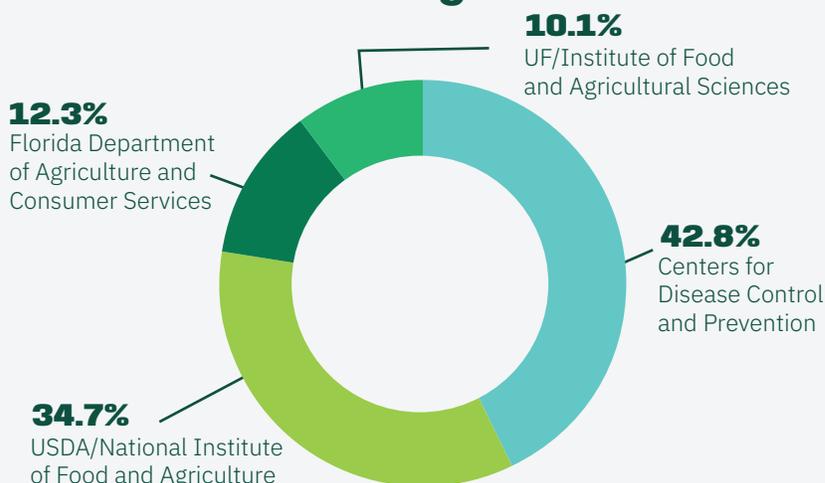


Pictured above: EDIS (Electronic Data Information Source) publication of glossary terms and a promotional survey card.

“This project has given us an opportunity to take our research and integrate it into a tool that can be used across Florida to create a common understanding around a topic that is quite complex,” Baker said. “Projects like this are core to the PIE Center’s mission to create shared understanding around issues and policy affecting agriculture and natural resources.”

To view the SSNM glossary, visit edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/AG488. Details on this project and other PIE Center work related to BMPs are available at piecenter.com/bmp.

PIE Center Funding Sources



The PIE Center led or partnered on **10** new and continuing grant projects, extending beyond 2024.

\$5M
in research partnerships

\$488K

Research dollars awarded to the PIE Center

These partnerships included a wide range of state and federal agencies.



PIE Fellows

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) relaunched the 2024-2025 PIE Fellows program with a renewed focus on science communication and social science research.

“The PIE Fellows program is a unique high impact experience for students to work with peers from other academic disciplines,” said Ashley McLeod-Morin, PIE Center assistant extension scientist. “Each student brings their unique background and educational experiences to elevate the work of the PIE Center.”

PIE Center faculty and staff designed the updated program to provide a professional development experience for students from diverse academic backgrounds.

The 2024–25 PIE Fellows cohort was made up of five graduate students and one undergraduate student, representing two colleges and four academic departments.

Throughout the academic year, Fellows worked with public perception data collected through PIE Center research. They investigated agricultural issues, analyzed data, interpreted

findings and developed final projects in the form of research or outreach products.

PIE Fellows engaged with online learning modules focused on core topics and skills relevant to the center’s mission, including problem identification, research strategies, outreach and science communication.

Upon completing the program, PIE Fellows presented their work to the PIE Center during a celebration event.

I'm much more confident in my science communication abilities since joining the PIE Fellows. I'm able to look at a problem and try to find solutions to communicate that problem to the public.



Astrid Ericson, 2024–2025 PIE Fellow
M.S. student in Agricultural Education and Communication

PIE Center launches extreme weather campaign

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) launched an extreme weather campaign to share with the public resources created by the center and its partner programs.

Extreme weather events recur in Florida, and the PIE Center has multiple resources that can be used by Extension agents, government officials and community leaders to prepare their communities for disasters.

“Our goal with this campaign was to share PIE Center resources, new and old, with the public to ensure they are aware of our resources and are prepared for serious weather events,” said Annabel Henson, PIE Center marketing and communications specialist.

The social media and e-newsletter campaign covered three critical areas during summer months: hurricane preparedness, heat and post-hurricane resources.

The PIE Center, in partnership with Florida EDEN, released hurricane preparedness resources, including the Florida EDEN Readiness series, podcast episodes and a leadership course for disaster response.

In collaboration with the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS), the PIE Center also shared tools to combat heat-related illness, highlighting Florida’s high risk due to long summers.

More resources related to extreme weather are available at piecenter.com.

UF and IFAS collaborate to educate public and backyard flock owners about bird flu (H5N1)

Researchers and communication specialists at the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) have been working with professionals across the state of Florida to address the ongoing H5N1 avian flu outbreak.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), also known as bird flu, H5N1 and avian influenza, is a type A virus that primarily affects wild bird species and domestic birds, including chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese, significantly impacting the U.S. agriculture industry.

The PIE Center has been at the center of the University of Florida's response to the H5N1 outbreak.



Graduate assistant Kayla Braggs presents her research on bird flu at the 2025 Association for Communication Excellence Conference.

“The PIE Center is a leader in tackling issues that intersect between science and policy,” said PIE Center director Ricky Telg. “In addressing avian flu, the PIE Center is collaborating with researchers and educators across UF, the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety, IFAS Extension and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS).”

The PIE Center developed informational issue guides and Extension fact sheets (EDIS documents), ensuring that timely and accurate information on H5N1 risks, response strategies and mitigation efforts were provided to industry personnel across the state, Telg said.

Benjamin Anderson, assistant professor in UF's department of environment and global health and leader of the UF Emerging Pathogens Institute's bird flu response team, is among the set of infectious disease experts that helped compile the informational guides to address misinformation surrounding the topic of bird flu.

“Misinformation can cause people to make decisions that increase their risk of exposure and/or infection.” said Anderson. “Misinformation can also hurt industries that rely on consumer trust. These resources are critical for providing verified and factual information/recommendations to the public so that they can make appropriate decisions for themselves and their loved ones.”

Telg facilitates the meetings and communication of UF's H5N1 Coordination Group, comprised of researchers from several disciplines and Extension faculty. This group meets monthly via Zoom to discuss situational updates of the virus's spread and education strategies to ensure that messaging about H5N1 is clear, relevant and actionable, Telg said.

Visit piecenter.com/bird-flu/ for more information on frequently asked questions and more resources relating to bird flu.

Bird Flu Fact Sheets and Issue Guide

PUBLICATIONS AND AWARDS



Graduate assistant Dorcas Sunday presents her award-winning poster on zoonotic disease at the 2025 ACE Conference.

24

Research and EDIS publications

19

Research and communications awards

ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE (ACE) AWARD HIGHLIGHTS

Gold Award: PIE Fellows Outstanding Poster: Dorcas Sunday
Co-authors: Lauri M. Baker and Heather Young

Silver Awards:
PIE Academy
Florida Residential Fertilizer Toolkit
6th Annual State of the Science Meeting

FACULTY

Ricky Telg, Professor & PIE Center Director
Lauri Baker, Professor
Tracy Irani, Professor
Angie B. Lindsey, Associate Professor
Ashley McLeod-Morin, Assistant Extension Scientist
Erica Odera, Associate Scientist

STAFF & SUPPORT STAFF

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Mackenzie Atkins, Research Assistant
Annabel Henson, Marketing and Communications Specialist
Michaela Kandzer, Communications Specialist
Karlabeth Leitheiser, Extension Program Specialist
Aly Morrison, Operations Specialist
Anissa Mattox, Research Coordinator
Cheng-Xian Yang, Post-Doc

STUDENTS

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Jessica Czipulis, Graduate Assistant
Megan Edge, Graduate Assistant
Dorcas Sunday, Graduate Assistant
Caitlynne Youmans, Graduate Assistant

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