

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

Impact



**2025-2026
Annual Report**

A LETTER FROM

Ricky Telg **PIE Center Director**

The theme of this year's annual report is **Impact**, and as you'll see throughout this report, the PIE Center is continuing to make significant impacts in the areas of social science research and outreach in the state and nation.

Our presence was felt at major conferences in our discipline through professional development workshops and research presentations. We received several prestigious awards for our research and outreach products. We partnered with agricultural associations and collaborated with UF departments on newly funded grants, while continuing our efforts on existing grant-funded projects.

One of our most extensive projects this year has been Optimizing IFAS, a multi-year study to examine the perceived public value of the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. In Phase 1, we surveyed Floridians, agriculture and natural resources stakeholders, agriculture teachers, county commissioners and nonprofit organization leaders. We are currently in Phase 2, conducting interviews, gathering online open-ended responses from several audiences and analyzing online trend data. We believe this comprehensive approach will identify current and future issues that IFAS could potentially address through Extension programming, research and teaching.

After reading this annual report, I hope you see how the PIE Center is realizing its Vision Statement as being recognized by our peers and stakeholders as the preeminent research and education organization on the social science perspectives of agricultural and natural resource issues.



A LETTER FROM

Scott Angle **Senior Vice President, UF/IFAS**

The PIE Center is playing a central role in shaping the future of UF/IFAS. Through its careful application of social science to survey and interview stakeholders and rigorous scientific analysis to identify recurring themes, the PIE Center has provided UF/IFAS leadership actionable information as to how we can serve Florida better.

The PIE Center is consistently a critical contributor to UF/IFAS excellence. It contributes to our stakeholders' satisfaction through initiatives such as Optimizing IFAS.

The PIE Center elevates our national reputation, and in so doing contributes to the new university president's vision of elevating UF's national reputation in a way that raises its highest-profile rankings.

The reputation of the PIE Center as the nation's leading research, teaching and Extension center of its type was solidified in 2026 with numerous awards from the Association for Communication Excellence. These honors include:

- Outstanding Professional Skills Award
- 3 Gold Awards, 1 Silver Award and 1 Bronze Award in categories such as Crisis and Issues Management; Electronic Media, Video & Audio; Education Technology and Design; and Publishing
- The ACE Fellow Award to PIE Center Director Ricky Telg. This is the highest honor the Association bestows, for career contributions to the association and the profession.

The impact of the work of Dr. Telg and his team extends across all of UF/IFAS and all of Florida. You can read about examples of how in the pages that follow.



OUR YEAR IN *Review*

The PIE Center continued to strengthen its research, outreach and educational efforts throughout the 2025–2026 fiscal year. The center collaborated on 11 grant projects, securing \$551,000 in research funding, and expanded its digital reach with 70,000 website views. Scholarly productivity remained robust, with 41 publications, 36 conference presentations and 18 faculty awards recognizing excellence across teaching, research and Extension. Together, these accomplishments reflect steady growth in capacity and impact, positioning the PIE Center to engage even more people through its programming.

9 **\$516,016**

grant projects research funding awarded to the PIE Center

Sources of Research Funding

26.2%

UF/Institute of Food
and Agricultural
Sciences

46%

Centers for
Disease Control
and Prevention/
National Institute
for Occupational
Safety and Health

13%

USDA/National
Institute of Food
and Agriculture

3.6%

Florida Department of
Environmental Protection

1.6%

National Academy
of Sciences

3.1%

Florida
Cattlemen's
Association



2,306

Email Subscribers



3,300

Video Views



70,000

Page Views



36

Conference
Presentations



18

Total Faculty Awards



41

Publications

27

Journal Articles

14

EDIS Publications

PIE CENTER WINS AWARDS AT CONFERENCES

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources attended the 2026 Association for Communication Excellence (ACE) conference in Billings, Montana, from June 15-17. This year's conference theme was "Trailheads and Trailblazers."



ACE President Stacey Stearns presents Ricky Telg with the ACE Fellow award at the 2026 ACE Awards Ceremony.

PIE Center faculty and staff presented research posters and workshops during the conference.

PIE Center Director Ricky Telg received the ACE Fellow Award for his contributions to the Association for Communication Excellence and his dedication to the agricultural communication profession.

"The PIE Center's national prestige contributes to the overall standing of UF/IFAS as one of the nation's most impactful agriculture and natural resource programs," said Scott Angle, UF/IFAS senior vice president. "Telg's leadership has been essential in guiding and inspiring a talented team in its teaching, research and Extension work."

In addition to this recognition, the PIE Center and partner program the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS) received one Outstanding Professional Skill (OPS) award, three gold awards, one silver award and one bronze award. The center's bird flu (H5N1) campaign earned both a gold award and OPS award for its work combating misinformation about bird flu. The campaign included newsletters, a dedicated website, fact sheets, expert-led webinars and EDIS publications.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION



ACE President Stacey Stearns and Gold and OPS Award recipients from SCCAHS.

Gold & Outstanding Professional Skill Award: Bird Flu (Influenza H5N1) Campaign

Gold Award: 7th Annual State of the Science Meeting

Gold Award: SCCAHS Monthly E-Newsletters

Silver Award: Policy Communication Lunch and Learn Program

Bronze Award: "Culebra, Puerto Rico" short film

ACE Fellow Award: Ricky Telg

**PIE Center Director & Professor,
UF Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC)**



L to R: Dorcas Sunday and Lauri Baker discuss research poster with conference attendee.



Astrid Ericson presenting at the 2026 ACE conference.



L to R: Lauri Baker, Ricky Telg and Erica Odera

EXTENSION DISASTER EDUCATION NETWORK SPRING TRAINING

The National Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) held its 2026 Spring Training Conference in Tampa from Feb. 24-26, bringing together Extension professionals, researchers and emergency management partners for three days of disaster management education and training.

Marshal Sewell from Mind Your Melon delivered the keynote address focusing on mental health after natural disasters. Angie Lindsey, Florida EDEN Point of Contact and immediate past chair of the National EDEN Executive Committee, said additional presentations from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, the Florida State Fair and TECO Energy offered attendees perspectives from law enforcement, large-scale event management and critical infrastructure sectors.

The conference program featured Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Incident Command System training, train-the-trainer sessions and discussions focused on mental health and recovery resources. Attendees also participated in a pre-training workshop and an off-site excursion.

Lindsey, Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources affiliate faculty and UF/IFAS department of Family, Youth and

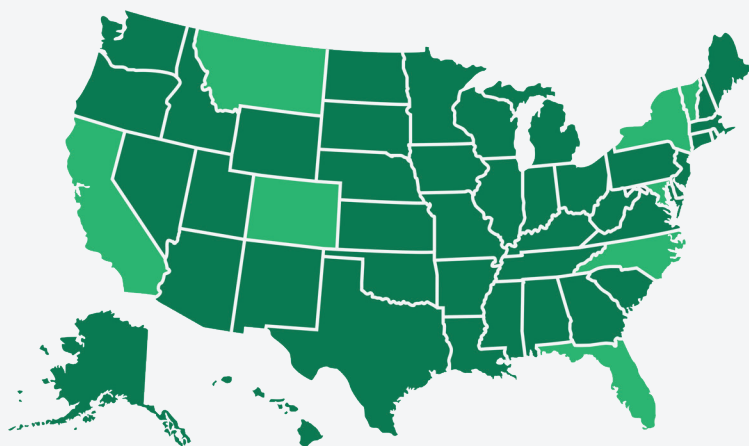


Spring conference attendees discussing training topics in-between sessions. Photo credit: Mackenzie Atkins

Community Sciences associate professor, said the EDEN Spring Training provided a platform for Extension professionals to share innovative programs, build inter-agency partnerships and advance disaster education curriculum at local, state and national levels.

Poster presentations highlighted current research and practice in disaster education, preparedness, mitigation, response, recovery and resilience. Submissions came from EDEN Points of Contact and Delegates, Extension professionals and EDEN partners across the country.

WHERE IN THE USA IS THE PIE CENTER



CALIFORNIA

American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Conference

COLORADO

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Vector Week

FLORIDA

- Nature Coast Biological Station Meeting
- Florida Cooperative Extension Summit
- Governor's Hurricane Conference
- American Assoc. for Agricultural Education (AAAE) Conference
- Florida Floodplain Managers Assoc. (FFMA) Conference
- Conducting research for Franklin's Promise Evaluation project
- Florida Sea Grant Staff Retreat

MARYLAND

Public Issues Leadership Development (PILD) Conference

MONTANA

Association for Communication Excellence (ACE) Conference

NEW YORK

Digital Marketing World Forum (DMWF)

NORTH CAROLINA

Research Trip to the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC)

PIE FELLOWS 2025 - 2026 COHORT



L to R: Karlibeth Leitheiser, Charlie Hochfelder, Lydia Blay, Camil Coss Flores, Killian Johnston and Ashley McLeod-Morin

The UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) facilitated the 2025-26 PIE Fellows program, providing hands-on professional development in science communication and social science research. The cohort included six students, four graduate students and two undergraduates, representing two colleges and four academic departments.

Throughout the academic year, Fellows worked with public perception data from PIE Center research projects focused on food and health perceptions and the health and safety needs of agricultural workers in the Caribbean. Students analyzed data, interpreted findings and developed educational and outreach products, including EDIS publications, issue guides and workshop plans.

Fellows also completed online modules covering problem identification, research methods, outreach and science communication, while participating in live workshops on data analysis and graphic design tools.

“This year’s PIE Fellows program strengthened students’ science communication skills through applied learning,” said Karlibeth Leitheiser, PIE Center Extension program specialist. “Coming from diverse academic backgrounds with limited experience in data visualization and science communication, the Fellows developed creative products that effectively translated science for public audiences while building valuable professional skills.”

The program concluded with a celebration event in April 2026, where Fellows presented their final projects to PIE Center faculty and staff.

PIE CENTER FOLLOWER COUNT



2,844

UF/IFAS Center for
Public Issues Education



1,625

@thePIECenter



978

@uf_piecenter



293

UF/IFAS Center for
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CENTER COLLABORATION TO UNDERSTAND TICK-BORNE DISEASE COMMUNICATION

As cases of tick-borne diseases continue to rise across the United States, the need for effective prevention, education and disease management strategies has become increasingly important. In response, faculty from the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) are collaborating with the Southeastern Center of Excellence in Vector-Borne Diseases (SECVBD) on a five-year project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to better understand both public perceptions and clinical challenges associated with tick-borne illnesses.

In early March, Lauri Baker, a professor in agricultural education and communication (AEC), PIE Center affiliate faculty member and social scientist with the SECVBD, led a team to conduct 15 semi-structured interviews with clinicians, including physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners in North Carolina. The team included students from the PIE Center and the UF Department of Agricultural Education and Communication (AEC), in partnership with the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC).

The interviews explored clinical decision-making, diagnostic challenges and familiarity with tick-borne diseases. Researchers identified diagnostic challenges, gaps in education and differences between reported cases and tick-based detection data.

“We gathered a lot of rich data that I believe will contribute to larger conversations surrounding the diagnosis and reporting of tick-borne illnesses,” said Astrid Ericson, an AEC graduate student.

The team presented findings from previous work on tick-borne disease from online search behavior



L to R: Astrid Ericson, Dorcas Sunday, Lauri Baker and physician in North Carolina.

research and surveys with cattle producers and Extension agents. Baker traveled to Colorado to attend the CDC’s Vector Week conference. There, she presented findings from a study of more than 2,000 adults across the southeastern United States that examined how message source, tone and strength influence attitudes toward tick prevention.

The study found that moderately framed, scientist-led messages were most effective overall, underscoring the importance of trust and audience-centered communication when encouraging preventive health behaviors.

“This work has provided multiple opportunities for our students and partners to learn about the socio-behavioral aspects of tick-borne disease and public health implications that are so important for the agriculture and natural resource industries,” Baker said.

The PIE Center and SECVBD continue to investigate tick-borne disease communication and how online information influences prevention behaviors. To learn more about this work and access related resources, visit piecenter.com/ticktalk/.

EXPANDING OUTREACH THROUGH ONLINE WEBINARS

This year, the PIE Center and its partner programs, the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS) and the Florida Extension Disaster Education Network (FL EDEN), expanded outreach by organizing time-sensitive webinars on topics including the New World screwworm, communication strategies for hurricanes and heat-illness prevention. Together, the PIE Center, SCCAHS and FL EDEN held 14 webinars with more than 400 attendees.

Recordings of webinars can be found on piecenter.com/webinars and sccaahs.org/past-webinars.



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Webinar Registrants

FACULTY

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

STAFF & SUPPORT STAFF

Sandra Anderson, Research Coordinator
Mackenzie Atkins, Research Assistant
Annabel Henson, Marketing and Communications Specialist
Karlitheth Leitheiser, Extension Program Specialist
Anissa Mattox, Research Coordinator
Aly Morrison, Operations Specialist

STUDENTS

Kayla Braggs, Graduate Assistant
Jami Bueker, Graduate Assistant
Astrid Ericson, Graduate Assistant
Shanie Keene, Communications Assistant
Dorcas Sunday, Graduate Assistant

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Cover Photo: UF/IFAS Communications
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