



## UF/IFAS Range Cattle Research and Education Center Update

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We don't know what the future holds. In reflecting on 2020, we should probably start expecting the unexpected. Things were looking very good at the beginning of 2020 for many of us. Then, well, I don't think I have to tell anyone what happened next. As COVID-19 became more real across our communities, state, and nation, the way UF/IFAS and we at the center operated became drastically different. Initially, we limped in maintenance mode taking care of our animals and pastures with many of our research and extension efforts on pause. We became experts using Zoom and Microsoft Teams for virtual meetings, including job interviews and field days. Slowly, we were able to resume some research and extension activities with significant limitations. Even though we were faced with some very different circumstances in 2020, we have had a successful year at the research center.

Student education is a top priority of the research center. We hosted six international interns and advised 7 PhD and 3 MS students in 2020. Three of the PhD students and one MS student completed the requirements for their degrees. Many of these students received awards during their time at the center. Elizabeth Palmer, PhD student advised by Dr. Philippe Moriel, received the American Society of Animal Science-Southern Section Joseph P. Fontenot Award and was one of four graduate students in the UF/IFAS Department of Animal Sciences to receive a scholarship from the Florida Feed Association. She also tied for 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Graduate Student Poster competition at the American Society of Animal Science Annual Meeting. Leandro Otavio Vieira Filho, a PhD student in Dr. Maria Silveira's program, earned 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the 2020 American Society of Agronomy-Crop Science Society of America-Soil Science Society of America tri-society annual meeting in the Soil & Water Management & Conservations graduate student poster competition. At this same meeting, Jaime Garzon, a PhD student in Dr. Joao Vendramini's program, earned 1<sup>st</sup> place honors in the Robert F. Barnes PhD oral competition in the Forages and Grazingland Division. If you would like to learn more about our current and former students, Bethany Wight of our Wildlife Ecology & Conservation Lab has written a series of blogs on each of our students: <http://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/rcrec/>.

Even in the midst of a pandemic, the RCREC faculty have had a successful year. Maria Silveira was a co-author on one of eight publications that were selected as UF/IFAS High Impact Research Publications and she was also named Multi-state Project Chair of the multi-state project examining the beneficial use of residuals to improve soil health and protect public, and ecosystem health for a period of 5 years. Joao Vendramini received the Extension Award at the

2020 American Society of Animal Science Southern Section Meeting in January. Philippe Moriel was the recipient of two awards this past year including the UF/IFAS Richard Jones Outstanding New Faculty Award as well as the Christine Taylor Waddill Extension Professional Enhancement Award. Chris Prevatt received both state and national awards for his extension programming efforts from the Florida Association of Agricultural Agents and the National Association of County Agricultural Agents. I was also humbled by the Florida FFA Association with a Honorary State FFA Degree. In addition to faculty being recognized for our efforts, our refereed research publication and extension publication numbers for 2020 have also remained strong, and I expect that the center will remain near the top of all UF/IFAS departments and research centers with regards to research publications per research appointment. The highlight of our faculty news is the hiring of Dr. Hance Ellington as our Grazinglands Wildlife Specialist. Given the pandemic, Hance began his employment working remotely from Canada until early 2021.

Although the pandemic has disrupted much of our research and extension activities for 2020, we realized that we must continue to plan for the future of the RCREC. The faculty met in early December to discuss updating our strategic plan for the next 5 years. During this meeting we established four strategic goals: 1) Attract and retain outstanding faculty and staff, 2) Enhance collaboration with state agencies, water management districts, conservation groups, and traditional and non-traditional clientele, 3) Improve infrastructure, and 4) Increase technology investments and applications by faculty, staff, and students. We continue to modify our action steps for each of these strategic goals, but we hope to have the entire strategic plan finalized by the end of the first quarter in 2021. As 2020 drew to a close, all departments and centers were allowed to submit two priority faculty positions to IFAS administration. The faculty decided upon two positions with regards to watershed hydrology and a forage plant breeder would complement the existing faculty programs at the center. There is no guarantee that we will receive funding for these positions, but we have a plan moving forward when the economy returns. With regards to infrastructure, we hope to make significant strides improving our cattle handling facilities and upgrading our internet capabilities.

In 2021, we celebrate 80 years as a research center. We look forward to celebrating this milestone at our Field Day that is planned for October 7, 2021. Many things have changed over the past 80 years at the center, and we hope that we will continue to be progressive and provide the science-based information that our clientele need to continue to be successful in the years to come.

Questions, contact me at [sellersb@ufl.edu](mailto:sellersb@ufl.edu).

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