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**From the Center Director**

The holiday season is upon us, and we at the WFREC have much to be thankful for. We have good support from UF upper administration and from local agencies, businesses, and producers. As for myself, I'm particularly thankful for the wonderful folks I work with, and I can truly say that I've never encountered a more dedicated, hard-working group of folks in my career than those that help make our Center a success. I'm also grateful for the warm welcome my family and I received since our move. Along with the friendly people in the area, Milton is a great place to live owing to its surrounding bays, forests, and farms – it's truly a paradise for a guy that grew up in southwest Mississippi, and it feels like home. Having been here almost a year, I become more convinced each day that relocating to the WFREC was the best professional and personal move that my family and I have ever made. I thank the UF, the WFREC, and our many supporters in the Panhandle for bringing us here.

Congratulations are in order for several folks at the WFREC, including three graduate students that finished their programs in 2014. Dr. Megan Brown successfully defended her Ph.D. dissertation – "Feral Hog (*Sus Scrofa*) Disturbance In Seepage Slope Wetlands" – under the direction of Dr. Debbie Miller. Ms. Neeta Soni completed an M.S. degree under the direction of Dr. Ramon Leon; her thesis was titled "Vinasse and biochar effect on the germination, growth, and control of weed species". Dr. Jing Zhang completed her Ph.D. under the direction of Dr. Bryan Unruh with a dissertation titled "Canopy responses of warm-season turfgrass to different mowing heights, trinexapac-ethyl application, drought, and light intensity". I congratulate these students with regard to their intelligence, hard work, and perseverance – getting a graduate degree is a long, difficult grind and a notable accomplishment.



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On 12 December we will confer Bachelor of Science degrees to five undergraduate students including Micah Byers, Courtney Culler, Shane Jurjens, Cortney Tyson, and Christie Wagner. We have the good fortune of having Mr. Hooper Matthews as our graduation speaker. Hooper is a well-respected forester, landowner, and businessman, and I look forward to hearing the wisdom he will impart to our new graduates. I congratulate these students in advance for completing their B.S. degrees.

Kudos also go to Dr. Mack Thetford, who was recently awarded the prestigious International Plant Propagation Society Fellows Award. This award was created to honor and recognize outstanding individuals for their contributions to the nursery industry and to plant propagation in the Southern Region. This honor brings recognition to not only Dr. Thetford, but our Center as well. Congratulations Mack!

We had two events this fall that brought positive attention to the WFREC. On October 24 we held our first annual Harvest Dinner fundraiser. The Harvest Dinner was comprised of a great BBQ meal, a live band, a silent auction, and a comedian. WFREC personnel worked very hard to put on this successful event that raised awareness of and money for our Center. Farm to City occurred during the week of Thanksgiving, and on 11/24-25 the WFREC was in high gear with regard to helping feed the needy in our area and raising awareness of the role farmers play in food production and security in our nation. On 11/24 we had 148 students from local high and middle schools at the Jay Research Facility to help harvest collards and turnips that were taken to Milton and Pensacola for distribution on 11/25. These students also bagged sweet potatoes, grits, and cornmeal for distribution, and got a tour of our farming and gristmill operations. The students did a great job, and were quite interested in the agricultural science we have going on at the farm. On 11/25 the commodities from the Jay Research facility, along with turkeys, canned goods, and bakery goods from the Bay Area Food Bank were distributed to over 600 families in Santa Rosa and Escambia counties. The food distribution was a great success, and the recipients expressed their gratitude. I thank all WFREC personnel that participated in preparation of the Harvest Dinner and the Farm to City food harvest/distribution. Without your help these events would not be possible. Moreover, I'm grateful to the many private businesses and individuals that helped sponsor these events.

I wish everyone happy holidays and success in your endeavors in the coming year.

GO GATORS!



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WFREC would like to welcome Dr. Michael J. Mulvaney as our new Cropping Systems Specialist and Assistant Professor. His experience with conservation tillage, nutrient management, crop rotations and protection, carbon sequestration, and specialty crops makes him a valuable addition to our program.

Dr. Mulvaney has worked and traveled in over 50 countries on six continents, obtained \$2.2 million in lifetime grants, published in high-impact peer-reviewed journals, and won several awards for the presentation of scientific research.

He comes to us from the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, known by its Spanish acronym CIMMYT, within the Global Conservation Agriculture Program where he worked as a Cropping Systems Agronomist. There he led Syngenta-funded research on maize-wheat systems utilizing conservation agriculture (no-till, rotations, and permanent soil cover) under rain-fed and irrigated conditions in various parts of Mexico. He also managed yield potential trials under full and reduced irrigation with no-till and conventional tillage, with and without seed protection products, to investigate Genotype x Environment x Chemical interactions.

Previously, Dr. Mulvaney served as the Assistant Program Director for the USAID SANREM CRSP (Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resources Management Collaborative Research Support Program) at Virginia Tech. There he coordinated crop and soils research in 13 developing countries with seven US universities to determine the feasibility of conservation agriculture for rain-fed staple crop production among smallholders in the developing world. His work focused on carbon sequestration and soil fertility dynamics after conversion to conservation agriculture.

Previous experience includes serving in the US Army National Guard (1990-94), where he was awarded a National Defense Service Medal, and working as a Medicinal Chemist for Bayer Pharmaceuticals, where he developed novel molecules to target Alzheimer's, cancer, and osteoarthritis. He also led the community garden program in Auburn, worked as a Horticultural Operations Foreman in Ireland, and implemented large animal vaccination programs, beekeeping, and gravity irrigation systems as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Bolivia.

**Michael J. Mulvaney** | Cropping Systems Specialist

UF/IFAS West Florida Research and Education Center

4253 Experiment Drive, Hwy 182

Jay, FL 32565



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# Tomato Research

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At the Jay Research and Education Center there is always different agricultural research being directed. One field of research that is very exciting for our area is specialty crops. Specialty crops include most every crop that is not one of the main commodity crops in our location, like fruits and vegetables in Northwest Florida. Research on an heirloom tomato variety trial has just been concluded. This experiment was conducted in the spring and then duplicated in the fall. This trial tested 7 heirloom tomato varieties that include black prince, red pear perform, brandywine, pruden's purple, cherokee purple, great white, and striped german.



These varieties were started as seed at the North Florida research and education center in Quincy and then planted in a high tunnel at the Jay research facility. From there they were grown and harvested for data. The data collected were the yields in number and total pounds. The tomatoes were also graded as marketable or unmarketable. The data will now be sent back to a cooperating UF/IFAS Specialist in Quincy to be analyzed. The new information will help UF/IFAS Extension faculty make good recommendations on growing heirloom tomatoes in high tunnel structures in Northwest Florida.



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by Erin Tinney



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As academic recruiter I have to visit high school classes, college classes, and civic groups to tell them what WFREC offers for students. Of course, I tell them it's an opportunity for local students to get the same education as students in Gainesville do at a highly academically ranked public University. I tell them that our students in Milton pay less, about \$30-40 less per credit hour, because they don't have to pay a lot of the extra fees Gainesville charges due to using their facilities. A lot of busy students aren't able to use most of those facilities due to lack of time in Gainesville, but they still have to pay it there. Our students also save money because they don't have to pay for student housing, which can be pricey in Gainesville. Students will get the same degree as they would in Gainesville either in Natural Resource Conservation or in Plant Science. They will have a lot of the same professors as they would in Gainesville, because half their classes are online. But what seems to really catch their interest the most, from the feedback I get, is when I am speaking to them and I show the pictures taken from labs/field trips that only our students here get to experience. I also like to show them pictures that our students take when they Study Abroad, because even though they are at the Milton Campus they are still able to Study Abroad. We are in the process of organizing a trip to Central America, set up totally through WFREC.

Our students usually have at least three labs/field trips set up, throughout the semester, in almost each class taught at WFREC. They are set up on Saturday mornings. Our classes are small here so students are able to meet at the Milton campus and take vans to their labs/field trips. Our students usually stay in the Northwest Florida Panhandle when going out in the field. But, occasionally they go to Alabama. They did in the Spring to go on air boat rides, so they could experience the wetlands and wildlife. That same semester they also had an overnight trip to Solan Dixon Forestry Education Center in Alabama. All the trips they take allow students to actually have an opportunity to test water tables, or soil samples, or see wildlife in person that they haven't ever seen, or learn how to do controlled burns, etc. This hands on experience helps them get internships that later turn into job opportunities when they graduate. They aren't in a classroom & seeing these things on a screen, they are experiencing them. This allows them to be more qualified for jobs, and they can tell employers that not only did they learn about the things that jobs in their field request, but they can say they have real life experience with it. This is why most of our students get offered jobs after their internships. Our students don't go into this field because they like to be stuck inside a classroom all the time, they are students that want to study and work outdoors.

This is my best selling point when recruiting students for our program. Students who love the outdoors and would rather spend most of their time outdoors are the students who contact me about our programs.



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# Student Club Reps

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## Shaun Myers

### President



My name is Shaun Myers and I have spent the past 19 years working in public service as a firefighter and paramedic. I have been looking at what retirement will bring for me in 7 years, and decided on a career change. I am currently enrolled in the Natural Resources Conservation undergraduate program at the Milton campus. I have also just been accepted to the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Honors program. It is my intent to graduate after the fall 2015 semester with honors. I plan to continue my education with my master's degree and then on to my doctorate. I am balancing a full time school load with my primary job at the Destin Fire Control District, a second job as an adjunct instructor for the Northwest Florida State College EMS program, as well as my family life. I am married with a daughter currently enrolled at Santa Fe in Gainesville and a 15 year old son. I hope that my example is if you want it bad enough, and are willing to work for it, you will always find a way.

## Julia Retzloff

### Vice President



Hello My name is Julia Retzloff, and I have the honor of being the student club vice president.

I am a Natural Resource conservation major with a wildlife minor. One day I hope to be a park ranger working at a national park in the mountains. Until that day I am working to make our student club the best it can be, and getting experience anywhere I can. I have gotten to intern at Blackwater state forest helping manage the red cockaded woodpecker's habitat, and I am sure I will have many other experiences like these before I graduate.

I try to include my 5 year old daughter in any of my activities that I can. She is a big favorite volunteering in the green house. I try to share my love of nature with her, and pass along the knowledge I gain from my degree. For me natural resource conservation was an obvious choice, and I love it.

**Jill Varnagatas**  
**Secretary**



- Secretary
- Major NRC
- Minor Fisheries and Aquatic Science
- I volunteer for a ecological consulting company who monitors and restores oyster beds. I have the scars to prove it! Oyster shells will cut through a wet-suit! My goal at UF is to find a job that involves water and wildlife conservation. I enjoy any sport that involves water. In my free time you'll find me on the beach surfing, paddle boarding, fishing and diving.

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**Alex Steed**  
**Treasurer**



- **Class:** Senior
- **Hometown:** Gulf Breeze, FL
- **Major:** Natural Resource Conservation
- **Involvement:** National Park Service Volunteer, Forestry Club Member, Milton Student Club Member, Golden Key International Honor Society Member, Church Youth Group Leader
- **Hobbies:** Surfing, hiking, camping, skating, movies, spending time with friends and family
- **After College Plans:** Take time off to travel and then pursue my master's degree

**Wenwen's Work**

As many other warm season grasses, Zoysiagrass establishes lawns with dense canopies in a rather short period by vegetative growth of rhizomes and stolons. This aggressive growth habit not only minimizes the chance for weed invasion but also grants zoysiagrass resilience to traffic stress. Being highly versatile, Zoysiagrass makes ideal lawns in a wide variety of climates and conditions. In the state of Florida, zoysiagrass can be seen used for different turf purposes such as golf courses, parks and athletic fields. Additionally, while compared with bermudagrass, another most commonly used turf grass in the southern region of the United States, zoysiagrass is proven to have better shade tolerance and lower fertility requirement.

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Weed problems for zoysiagrass lawn usually come from grass weeds such as common bermudagrass, crabgrass and goosegrass. Because of the similar growth habits and aggressive nature, it can be very difficult to control grass weeds in zoysiagrass lawns without injuring the turf. Fluzifop-p-butyl (Fusilade™) is a general use post-emergence herbicide that kills annual and perennial grasses by inhibiting lipid synthesis while doing little or no harm to broad-leaved plants. However tolerance to fluzifop-p-butyl have been observed in certain zoysiagrass cultivars, which lead to my interest in studying the mechanism lying behind these observed variances in fluzifop-p-butyl resistance and its genetic fact. I believe this research project will help us discover the mechanism behind fluzifop-p-butyl resistance of zoysiagrasses and assist in future breeding programs aimed to develop high quality zoysiagrass with improved fluzifop-p-butyl resistance. After more tolerant zoysiagrass cultivars are made available, fluzifop-p-butyl will be safe to use on weed-contaminated zoysiagrass lawns since it won't injure the turf.

My study starts with identifying the most and least resistant cultivars and then crossing them to determine the genetic bases of this tolerance feature, based on which we can then design strategies to develop cultivars with high fluzifop-p-butyl tolerance. Additionally, an outdoor dose response project will be established studying how zoysiagrass lines react to different rates of fluzifop-p-butyl while maintained under field condition and determining the highest rate fluzifop-p-butyl can be applied at without compromising the quality of zoysiagrass turf. Another objective of this field project is to quantify the benefit of tank mixing a safener with fluzifop-p-butyl, more specifically to study the effect of safener in minimizing zoysiagrass injuries from fluzifop-p-butyl. We are hoping these above works combined can help us achieve more thorough understanding on the best application scheme of fluzifop-p-butyl on zoysiagrass, and potentially lead to commercialization of a new zoysiagrass cultivar with improved herbicide tolerance as well as higher overall quality within the next five years.



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# Graduation

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On December 12, 2014 The University of Florida, Milton Campus held a reception to honor five Bachelor of Science degree graduates. Dr. Wes Wood, Center Director of the WFREC, presented the Fall 2014 graduating class to family and friends. Faculty & fellow students extended congratulations and presented highlights of each graduate's time at the University of Florida Milton Campus. Congratulations to the following University of Florida graduates:

- Micah Byars**, Bachelor of Science—Forest Resources and Conservation
- Courtney Culler**, Bachelor of Science—Forest Resources and Conservation
- Shane Jurjens**, Bachelor of Science—Forest Resources and Conservation
- Cortney Tyson**, Bachelor of Science—Forest Resources and Conservation
- Christie Wagner**, Magna Cum Laude, Bachelor of Science—Forest Resources and Conservation

*Special thanks to guest speaker Hooper Mathews, Businessman, Forester, and Landowner.*

*For more information about the degree programs offered on the UF Milton Campus please visit our website at [Miltongators.com](http://Miltongators.com) or by contacting our office at 850-983-7125.*



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Pictured left to right: Micah Byars, Courtney Culler, Shane Jurjens, Cortney Tyson, and Christie Wagner

# Farm to City

As part of Farm-City week, 600 families in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties received full Thanksgiving meals Tuesday — much of it locally grown — thanks to the efforts of local farms, food banks and hundreds of FFA and 4-H students. Students from Tate High School's FFA chapter and local 4-H clubs helped with the Escambia County distribution at the Waterfront Rescue Mission.

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The 400 pre-qualified families in Santa Rosa County and 200 in Escambia County received turkeys, collard and turnip greens, sweet potatoes, cornmeal, canned goods and desserts. The sweet potatoes were donated by local farmers and sorted by FFA students from a half dozen schools, and students also picked the collards and turnips from the field Monday at the University of Florida Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences, West Florida Research and Education Center.

Representatives from the Santa Rosa and Escambia Extension Services were at the distribution sites providing recipe cards and cooking advice.

Farm to City Week is a national effort with the goal to bring about a better understanding between rural and urban people by increasing their knowledge and appreciation for agriculture.

The locally grown produce was harvested at the University of Florida, West Florida Research and Education Center by participating Ag students from Jay High School, Central High School, Milton High School, Northview High School, Tate High School, Ernest Ward Middle School and King Middle School.



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# Fall Harvest Dinner

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US Congressman  
Jeff Miller



Touch of Blue



Dr. J. Bryan Unruh,  
Associate Center  
Director



Bonfire



Attendees Eating  
Boiled Peanuts

The UF/IFAS West Florida Research and Education Center held its Fall Harvest Dinner on the evening of Friday, October 24, 2014. Attendees enjoyed the live band (Touch of Blue), BBQ dinner (Grover T's), comedian (Jody Fuller), silent auction, and bonfire. The purpose of the Fall Harvest Dinner was to raise awareness of the center and to raise funds to convert the equipment building used for events into a conference facility for faculty and students.



Dr. Wes Wood,  
Center Director



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Jody Fuller, Comedian/  
Speaker/Soldier



Dinner Line



Silent Auction



Attendees  
Eating Dinner