



*Commissioner's* **2015**  
**Ag-Environmental**  
**Leadership Awards**



**Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**  
**Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner**





## Dear Friends,

It is my great pleasure to recognize the recipients of the 2015 Commissioner's Agricultural Environmental Leadership Award – Bull Hammock Ranch, Carlton and Carlton Ranch and Dasher Farm. These outstanding operations are pioneers in utilizing environmentally sustainable practices to reduce water use, protect Florida lands and maximize efficiency.

Since 1994, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has recognized agricultural enterprises that demonstrate leadership in developing and implementing innovative and progressive techniques to safeguard the environment and conserve natural resources. It is an honor to highlight the efforts and accomplishments of these environmental stewards who serve as outstanding examples of agricultural guardianship. With their help, we can preserve and maintain Florida's abundant natural resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam H. Putnam". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Adam H. Putnam  
Commissioner of Agriculture



# Carlton and Carlton Ranch

Hillsborough County

As a boy, Dennis Carlton always dreamed of becoming a rancher. Today, his Carlton and Carlton Ranch is comprised of several ranches spanning six Southwest Florida counties. By reclaiming lost farmland, improving pastures and restoring wildlife habitat, he has established a showcase of agricultural stewardship.





Through Florida's Non-mandatory Land Reclamation Program, Dennis successfully converted the remnants of a depleted phosphate mine into 1,200 acres of pine forests, wildlife corridors and lush pastures ideal for rotational grazing. Bountiful lakes were created to capture and filter storm water. Today, Turkey Creek Ranch stands as one of the largest wetland restorations by private ownership in the Tampa Bay area.





Audubon Ranch, leased from Hillsborough County, was once a mass of invasive plants and unsuitable for grazing cattle. With the help of his son-in-law Pat Thomas, Dennis was able to restore the property to a healthy and economically viable cow/calf and haylage operation.

Dennis Carlton's father and grandfather originally owned Limestone Ranch in Hardee County until they sold the property in the 1970s. When this same property came up for sale in 2000 Dennis didn't hesitate to buy it. Today son Dennis Jr. manages the Limestone Ranch, which is the largest of the Carlton family's cow/calf operations.

A man of strong faith, Dennis also opens his Limestone Ranch to a number of different groups, such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes who spend a weekend of hunting and fellowship.







Following best management practices, Carlton and Carlton Ranch uses rotational grazing to improve its pastures and fences to keep cattle away from the young trees. Located on the Peace River corridor, Limestone Ranch enhanced the natural habitat for an abundant wildlife population.



Working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Dennis converted old citrus groves and pastureland near his home in Hillsborough County into more than 80 acres of strawberry fields. By installing a pump and well system on a 43-acre lake on his property, Dennis reduced the use of groundwater for irrigation and freeze protection of crops while maintaining the water quality and water levels of the lake.





From left, back row:  
Dennis Carlton Jr., Sara  
Beth Carlton, Dennis  
Carlton Sr., Alice Carlton,  
Maci Parker, Melissa  
Thomas, Patrick Thomas;  
front row: Tripp Thomas,  
Kassie Williams, Trent  
Thomas, Tucker Thomas,  
Jenna Parker.



# Dasher Farm

McAlpin

In 1971, third-generation Florida farmer Randall Dasher and his wife Pam started Dasher Farm in McAlpin. Through hard work and innovation, Randall turned a small family farm into an agricultural mainstay in Suwannee County.





By pairing a new method of drying seed with a more efficient cleaning process, Dasher Farm became one of the primary seed and grain processing and distribution businesses for Suwannee County and the surrounding areas.





After the cover crops are harvested, the remaining straw is rolled down, creating a thick mat that will eventually break down and add organic matter to the soil. Below the surface, the crop's established root system prevents leaching or erosion.



Using the strip-till method, Randall plants the next crop, such as peanuts, tilling only the seed row and leaving the rest of the field undisturbed.



Randall and his daughter Sarah have collaborated with Joel Love of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in the use of non-traditional irrigation. After three years of using these methods, Dasher Farm has achieved the same yields using less fertilizer with no irrigation.

Dasher Farm is truly a family-run operation. Daughter Sarah has been working for Randall for more than 15 years. As a co-operator of Dasher Farm, Sarah oversees the seed processing plant, greenhouse and farm operations. Son Justin serves as the farm's field manager, handling the crops from planting to harvesting.







Whether making meticulous observations of area rainfall, opening his farm to local visitors or being involved in agriculture-related groups, Randall is committed to moving the industry forward.



To promote the growth of sesame in Suwannee County, Randall serves as a liaison between the local sesame growers, sesame developer Sesaco, and researchers including Elena Toro of UF-IFAS.



In 1986, Dasher Farm ventured into hydroponics, building several greenhouses to grow a variety of vegetables and herbs.

To lessen the farm's environmental impact, Randall worked with Bob Hochmuth of UF-IFAS to implement a series of best management practices in the enclosed hydroponic system.





To adapt to the changing needs of local and national markets the Dashers are constantly trying new crops. In addition to being enjoyed in local restaurants, their hydroponic lettuce can be found in area schools as part of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services "Farm to School" program.



Randall hosts a peanut boil for family and friends each year in celebration of the fall harvest.



From left, back row: William Carte, Sarah Dasher Carte, Randall Dasher, Justin Dasher, Kylie Dasher; front row: Lindsleigh Carte, Maddie Carte, Pam Dasher.



# Bull Hammock Ranch

Fort Pierce

During the federal flood control projects of the 1940s, land between Lake Okeechobee and the Indian River was drained, opening up farmland and pastures. In 1947, Reuben Wright Carlton purchased tracts of this land to grow citrus and raise cattle, creating what would become Bull Hammock Ranch. Today, thanks to the diligent efforts of the Carlton family to restore the wetlands and preserve the surrounding watersheds, the ranch is a beautiful mosaic of flatwoods, pastures and restored wetlands.



The family constantly works to further improve the ranch. Wes Carlton worked with the South Florida Water Management District and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services on a number of water retention projects to protect nearby watersheds. The restored wetlands have enhanced wildlife habitats, allowing migratory and endangered birds, deer and other animals to flourish.





Bull Hammock Ranch is a 7,500-acre cow/calf operation owned and operated by Reuben's grandson Wes Carlton and Wes's sister Mary Anne Carlton Cruse, both sixth-generation Florida cattle ranchers.

The Carltons are committed to keeping Bull Hammock Ranch a family-run operation. Wes's son Wyatt is very active on the ranch, learning the trade from his father; daughter Colby spends her summers helping out with the cattle drives and cattle shipping; Mary Anne runs the office and oversees the weighing of the cattle; and wife Tracy runs the office and cares for the animals.





Working with engineer Loris Asmussen, Bull Hammock Ranch implemented an innovative water-farming pilot project that utilizes abandoned citrus groves as reservoirs. Through a system of culverts, the ranch can divert excess water from the adjacent C-23 canal to the 1,622-acre reservoir where nutrients are absorbed into the ground or taken up by vegetation.





In 2011, Wes Carlton reached out to SFWMD and FDACS to develop a plan to restore wetlands to their native state. Using a series of water lines and troughs to capture and hold rainwater during the wet seasons, Wes was able to rehydrate a 2,000-acre wooded area while providing fresh drinking water to his cattle.





Bull Hammock Ranch's best management practices extend beyond water storage to include controlled burns, soil testing and analysis, and rotational grazing.





Wes Carlton's most effective management tool just might be his grandfather's 1956 Piper Super Cub, which he finds more efficient than a pickup truck. At least once a day he takes off to inspect waterways, water management controls, cattle and fences.





From left, the Cruse family: Griffin, Paige, Chuck, Mary Anne; the Carlton family: Wes, Tracy, Wyatt, Colby.



# Previous Winners

## 2014

Agri-Starts, Inc. - Apopka  
Riverdale Potato Farm, Inc. - Elkton  
Milking R, Inc. - Okeechobee

## 2013

Kissimmee Park Properties, LLC - St. Cloud  
Ferris Farms - Floral City  
Farnton Tree Farm - Osteen

## 2012

Deroose Plants, Inc. - Apopka  
Southern Accent Farm - Okeechobee

## 2011

Straughn Farms, LLC - Waldo

## 2010

Saturiwa Conservation Area - Elkton  
3 Boys Farm - Ruskin  
Arapaho Citrus Management - Fort Pierce

## 2009

Dairy Production Systems - High Springs  
Loop's Nursery - Jacksonville

## 2008

Carroll Brothers Nursery - Clearwater  
Brock Family Farm - Monticello

## 2007

Butler Oaks Farm - Lorida  
Gwinn Brothers Farm - McAlpin  
Buck Island Ranch - Lake Placid  
Fraleigh Nursery - Madison

## 2006

Tampa Wholesale Nursery - Dover  
Riverview Flower Farm - Riverview  
Lightsey Cattle Company - Lake Wales

## 2005

Kerry's Bromeliad Nursery - Homestead  
Larson Dairy - Okeechobee  
Richard N. Raid, Ph.D. - Royal Palm Beach

## 2004

Blue Heron Groves - Lakeland  
M&B Products - Tampa  
McArthur Farms - Port St. Lucie

## 2003

Williamson Cattle Company - Okeechobee  
Sun City Tree Farm - Ruskin  
Aquatica Tropicals - Plant City

## 2002

Holloway Irrigation Systems - Leesburg  
Daniel A. Botts - Orlando  
Sanwa Growers - Wimauma

## 2001

Carlton 2x4 Ranch - Arcadia  
Barthle Brothers Ranch - San Antonio

## 2000

Pacific Tomato Growers - Palmetto  
Evans Properties - Vero Beach

## 1999

Two Rivers Ranch - Thonotosassa  
Lykes Bros. - Okeechobee  
Suwannee Farms - O'Brien

## 1998

Longino Ranch - Arcadia  
V&W Farms - Avon Park

## 1997

Anclote River Ranch - Odessa

## 1996

Edward "Jack" Campbell - Homestead  
Citrus World - Lake Wales  
Ekkwill Waterlife Resources - Gibsonton

## 1995

Schroeder Manatee Ranch - Bradenton  
Burt McKee - Tampa  
Davie Dairy - Okeechobee  
O.F. Nelson and Sons Nursery - Apopka  
Bright Hour Ranch - Arcadia  
Deseret Ranches of Florida - St. Cloud  
Fulford Farms - Monticello

## 1994

Rafter T Cattle Company - Avon Park  
A. Duda and Sons - Oviedo  
Babcock Florida Company - Punta Gorda  
Gustafson's Dairy - Green Cove Springs  
Jon's Nursery - Eustis  
Adams Ranch - Fort Pierce

