

2021 Inductee



John Stitt

John Stitt realized early in his career that the agricultural ecosystem in Southwest Florida was vastly different from that in Central Florida and the region around Lake Okeechobee. In addition, he saw that the need for research in beef cattle pastures and citrus and sandland sugarcane production was badly needed. That vision, coupled with years of effort, led to the development of the UF/IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center in Immokalee. Today, the center provides cutting-edge research for citrus, vegetables, water quality, soil science and weed science.

Stitt and his family moved to Miami shortly after his birth in 1938. His father bought land near Clewiston and developed it into a beef cattle operation when Stitt was a teen. Following graduation from Clewiston High School, he earned a bachelor's degree in animal science from the University of Florida in 1960 and a master's degree in animal production from Texas A&M University in 1962. After serving in the Air Force Reserve, he assumed management of the family cattle ranch in 1964.

In 1983, Stitt met with Ken Tefertiller, UF's vice president for Agriculture and Natural Resources, to propose a research center in southwest Florida. He organized several meetings with producers representing the cattle, citrus, sugarcane and vegetable industries in Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee counties to outline his idea. They expressed support and asked Stitt to lead the effort to organize the South Florida Agricultural Council and move the idea forward.

With Stitt's leadership and the cooperation of the legislative delegation, the council secured \$2.39 million in funding for construction. In 1988, the Board of Regents, the UF/IFAS leadership, and the council developed a five-year plan to complete the staff funding. The result was the opening of a fully funded research center staffed with a director and 12 researchers.

In addition to serving on numerous advisory committees to the Immokalee center, Stitt has been extensively involved in industry organizations, including the Florida Cattlemen's Association and Florida Farm Bureau. He and his wife, Sandra, live in Clewiston. The couple were blessed with three daughters: Melissa, Jennifer and Rachel, and they have four grandchildren.