





**Dear Friends,**

It is my great honor to recognize the recipients of the 2022 Commissioner's Agricultural Environmental Leadership Award: Lee Peanut Farms, The Groves of Peace River, and Usher Land and Timber. These outstanding enterprises are implementing innovative and progressive techniques to safeguard the environment and conserve natural resources, while growing food and fiber for the world.

Since 1994, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has recognized agricultural operations that demonstrate leadership by utilizing environmentally sustainable practices to reduce water use, protect Florida lands, and maximize efficiency. These environmental stewards serve as outstanding examples of agricultural guardianship. With their help, we can continue to preserve and maintain our state's abundant natural resources to keep Florida growing.

Sincerely,

*Nicole Fried*

Nicole "Nikki" Fried  
Commissioner of Agriculture

An aerial photograph of the Lee Peanut Farms facility. The central part of the image shows several large, tan-colored industrial buildings with grey roofs. To the left of these buildings is a long, low structure that appears to be a conveyor system or a long storage shed. In the foreground, there are several large, cylindrical metal storage tanks. To the right of the tanks, there are stacks of green and white materials, possibly bags of feed or seed. A small pond is visible in the lower right quadrant of the facility. The entire facility is surrounded by green fields and a dirt road. In the background, there are more fields and a line of trees.

# LEE PEANUT FARMS

## Lee

When Brooks Garland joined Lee Peanut Farms in 2011, he understood that farming in the Suwannee River Valley would be challenging. Deep sandy soil, diverse plant diseases and rising operating costs would make work difficult. For Lee Peanut Farms to be successful, Brooks recognized the need to streamline the use of its resources and inputs, and to implement Best Management Practices.

Lee Peanut Farms sits on 1,400 acres in Lee, Florida. Purchased in 2004 by parent company, Birdsong Peanuts, the operation rotates evenly between peanuts and field corn on most of those acres. The Farm also grows cotton and carrots.



Lee Peanut Farms produces over 5,600 pounds per acre of peanuts each year.



The operation also serves as a buying point for the region. Throughout the season peanuts are harvested and stored onsite in two massive warehouses each capable of holding up to eleven thousand tons of peanuts. Twenty-five percent of these peanuts are from Lee Peanut Farms, the rest are procured from area farmers.

Peanuts are graded and sorted based on variety, class, and quality. Those that meet the grade will be sold on the manufacturing market; the rest will be sold to make peanut oil.

David Royal (left) of the Nature Conservancy, has helped Brooks implement a series of best management practices (BMPs) on the farm. Through these BMPs, Lee Peanut Farms has improved efficiencies and reduced financial expenses at a time when farms worldwide are being hit hard with cost increases.



Crop specialists like De Broughton (left) assist with various BMPs including regular soil testing and tissue sampling.



BMPs like incorporating soil moisture sensors into operation's irrigation practices has saved over 200,000,000 gallons of water.



Switching his fertilizer application method from traditional broadcasting to banding, Brooks reduced nitrogen amounts by fifty pounds per acre. Joel Love (right) of UF/IFAS inspects the field corn.





In 2010, field corn was introduced as part of a crop-rotation BMP to reduce soil depletion and pest problems associated with growing single crops.

Greg Watts (left), owner of nearby Full Circle Dairy, is a ready buyer for the corn. Each year, Lee Peanut Farms grinds nearly seven thousand tons of corn meal to Full Circle's specifications, then delivers it to the dairy as feed for its cows.



Brooks Garland, manages Lee Peanut Farms and Lee Buying Point.



# THE GROVES OF PEACE RIVER

## Zolfo Springs

In 2006, third generation farmer Marlon Pendergrass left the hills of Northern Alabama for the fertile lands of central Florida. Along with his family, Marlon journeyed south to join his uncle at the family's newest farm, The Groves of Peace River. What began as an opportunity to expand the family business quickly grew into an unmistakable passion for Florida Citrus.



Situated on 860 acres near Zolfo Springs, the Groves of Peace River cultivates a variety of citrus including limes, grapefruit and US Early Pride Tangerines.



Transmitted by the Asian Citrus Psyllid, citrus greening is by far the largest threat facing Florida's citrus farmers. A bacterial infection, greening has led to unprecedented crop losses and continues to have a profound effect on the entire industry.

In addition to pesticides Marlon utilizes an innovative approach to fighting greening. Employing individual protection covers (IPCs), the grove can keep the deadly psyllids off the young trees. Below, Marlon and Jake apply an IPC.



Marlon (left) and his son Jake inspect grapefruit.





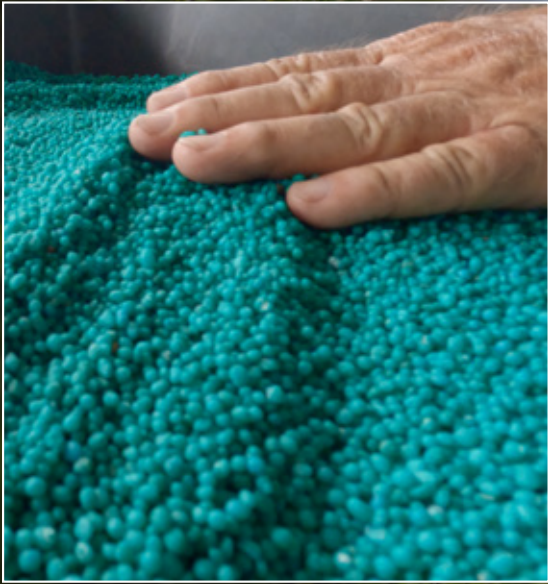
Precision Agriculture helps operations save time, labor, and money by following the Four Rs, using the right source, at the right rate, at the right time and the right place. Above, Crop Care Consultant Joe Murphy inspects the young fruit.



The Groves of Peace River utilizes a Total Grid system in tandem with the GPS-based Seeing Eye. This approach allows for the precise applications of water and nutrients throughout the grove.

Below, emitters apply nutrients directly to the base of the trees.





Designed to disperse over time, controlled-release fertilizers are used to provide a slow and steady flow of nutrients to the trees while reducing potential leaching from the soil. Through their use Marlon has been able to minimize his nutrient applications while maximizing the plants' uptake.



A series of ditches, drain tiles and control structures located throughout the groves allow Marlon to control the flow of water on the property. By retaining water in the ditches, he can maintain soil moisture levels and lower irrigation needs. Grasses absorb any excess nutrients.

Soil moisture probes placed throughout the groves provide detailed, real-time information. Accessed via computer or mobile application, this data is used to identify when and where to irrigate and can help prevent overwatering. David Royal (right) of the Nature Conservancy reviews irrigation data with Marlon.



Most of the water from the groves goes into nearby Charlie Creek which runs into the Peace River and eventually makes its way into Charlotte Harbor.





The Groves of Peace River maintains buffers that provide habitat for an abundance of wildlife including deer, turkey, and rabbits.



Marlon Pendergrass, Grove Manager and Partner at The Groves of Peace River.



# USHER LAND & TIMBER

## Chiefland

Usher Land and Timber, located in Chiefland is part of Usher Farms, a family-owned and operated timber and cow-calf operation just a mile from the Suwanee River. Under the guidance of owners Ken and Lynetta Griner, the operation is growing more than timber and cattle, it's growing awareness of the importance of agriculture in Florida.

Nearly half the state of Florida is covered with forests. The Florida timber industry employs over 124,000 people and has an economic impact of 25.1 billion dollars. Along with lumber and paper, Florida's pine forests also provide materials like cellulose that are incorporated into over 5,000 everyday household items from ice cream to smart phone screens.

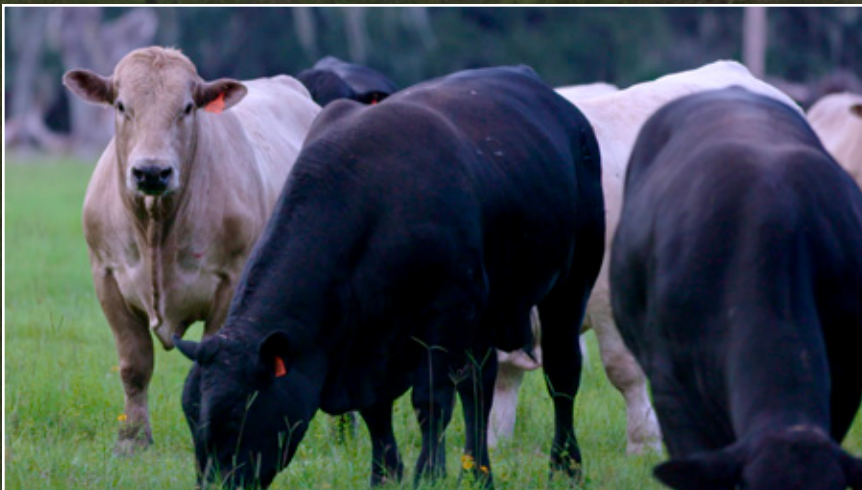


Above, Robin Holland (left) of the Florida Forest Service, discusses the use of BMPs with Lynetta (center) and timber operations manager Eric Handley (right.) Some BMPs like prescribed burning, are employed for forest health; others are used during harvesting to prevent erosion and sedimentation from entering nearby water features like the family's Clyatt Fish Hole (below).



Timber is essentially an 18-to-25-year crop. Because every stand is a long-term investment, Usher Land and Timber strives to make Florida's forests sustainable. A key strategy in caring for their trees is the use of silviculture best management practices (BMPs).





BMPs are also used in Usher Farms' cow-calf operation. Silvopasture – a symbiotic relationship between cattle and forestry – is used during the winter months. Following a frost, cows graze under the forest canopy where grasses remain green. This not only nourishes the livestock, it reduces the fuel load for a potential wildfire. Once a hobby for Lynetta's father E.T. "Etter" Usher, Jr. cattle are now managed by Ken and Lynetta's son Korey Griner (below).



Above, Ken Griner works the herd.

Stress is a major problem for cattle, affecting everything from vaccine efficacy to artificial insemination. To keep their animals calm, the farm incorporated several groundbreaking ideas of Dr. Temple Grandin when designing the facilities, including shaded pens, solid gates and curved and tapered lanes.

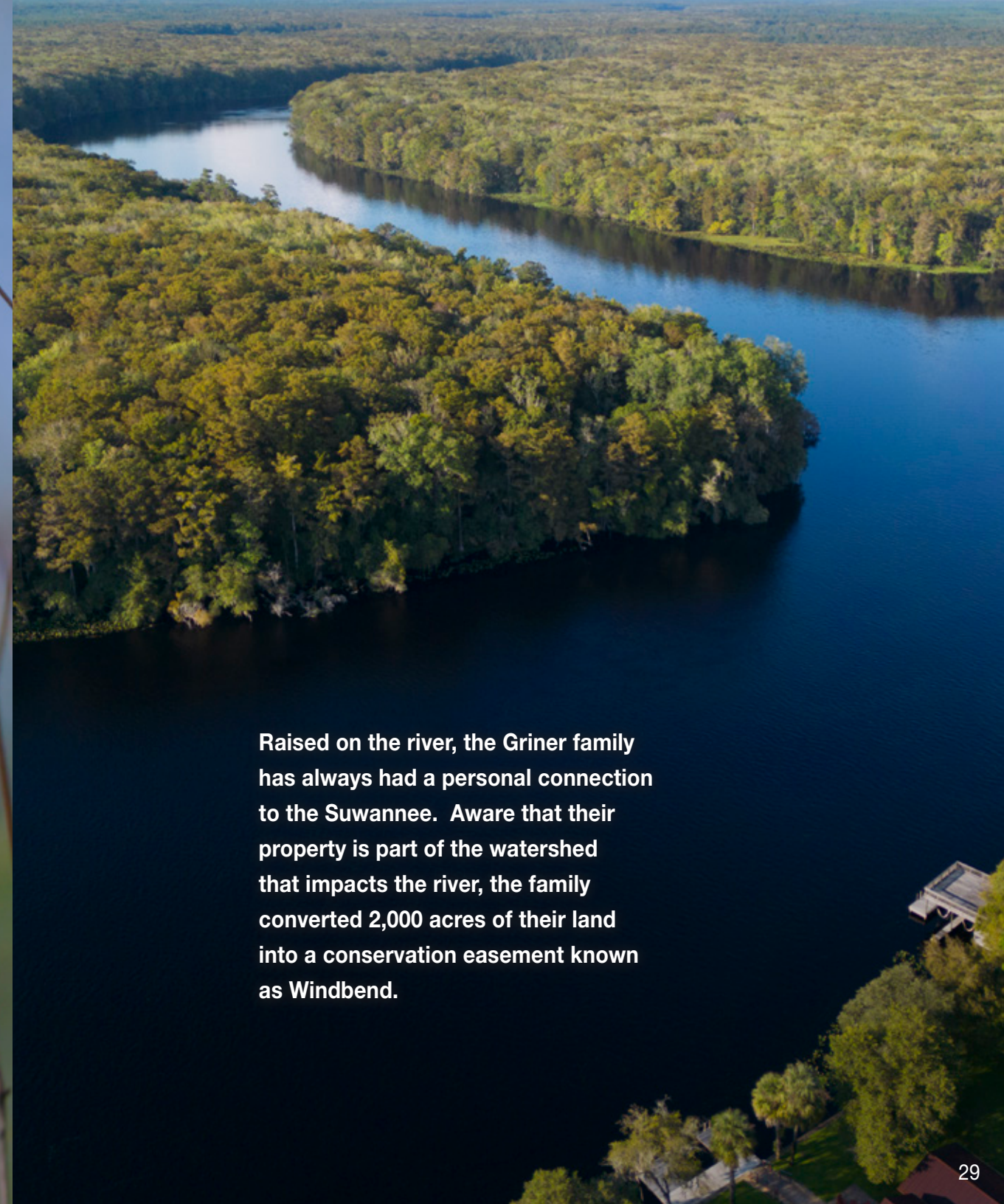




Whether serving on statewide working groups or local civic clubs, Lynetta strives to find common ground between stakeholders. Her advocacy reflects Usher Land and Timber's commitment to the agriculture industry.

Lynetta offers leadership to the Florida Climate-Smart Agriculture Work Group, a consortium of agriculture, conservation, business and government leaders, to quantify the ecosystem services that agriculture provides.

The ecosystem services that forests provide cannot be overstated. Trees filter and hold water, sequester carbon, and provide habitat to a variety of wildlife.



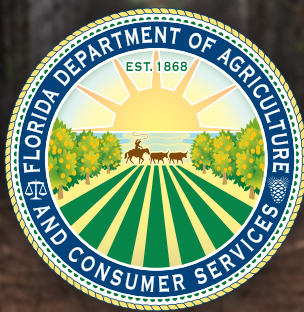
Raised on the river, the Griner family has always had a personal connection to the Suwannee. Aware that their property is part of the watershed that impacts the river, the family converted 2,000 acres of their land into a conservation easement known as Windbend.



**Usher Land and Timber, (standing) Korey Griner, Ken Griner, Eric Handley  
(seated) Lynetta Usher Griner.**

# PREVIOUS WINNERS

|             |                                                                                                                                                         |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>2021</b> | The Jungle Nursery – <i>Homestead</i><br>Tater Farms – <i>Hastings</i><br>Brad Turner – <i>Lithia</i>                                                   | <b>2006</b> | Tampa Wholesale Nursery – <i>Dover</i><br>Riverview Flower Farm – <i>Riverview</i><br>Lightsey Cattle Company – <i>Lake Wales</i>                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>2019</b> | Marshall Farms – <i>Baker</i><br>Blue Sky Farms – <i>Elkton</i><br>EIP Citrus Managment – <i>Polk</i>                                                   | <b>2005</b> | Kerry's Bromeliad Nursery – <i>Homestead</i><br>Larson Dairy – <i>Okeechobee</i><br>Richard N. Raid, Ph.D. – <i>Royal Palm Beach</i>                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>2018</b> | Tree-O-Groves – <i>Lake Alfred</i><br>Wild Goose Farms – <i>Umatilla</i><br>Blackbeards Ranch – <i>Myakka City</i>                                      | <b>2004</b> | Blue Heron Groves – <i>Lakeland</i><br>M&B Products – <i>Tampa</i><br>McArthur Farms – <i>Port St. Lucie</i>                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>2017</b> | Florida Blue Farms – <i>Waldo</i><br>Speedling – <i>Ruskin</i><br>Cindale Farms – <i>Marianna</i>                                                       | <b>2003</b> | Williamson Cattle Company – <i>Okeechobee</i><br>Sun City Tree Farm – <i>Ruskin</i><br>Aquatica Tropicals – <i>Plant City</i>                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>2016</b> | Jones Potato Farm – <i>Manatee and Hendry</i><br>Cherrylake – <i>Groveland</i><br>Alliance Dairies – <i>Trenton</i>                                     | <b>2002</b> | Holloway Irrigation Systems – <i>Leesburg</i><br>Daniel A. Botts – <i>Orlando</i><br>Sanwa Growers – <i>Wimauma</i>                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>2015</b> | Carlton and Carlton Ranch – <i>Hillsborough</i><br>Dasher Farm – <i>McAlpin</i><br>Bull Hammock Ranch – <i>Fort Pierce</i>                              | <b>2001</b> | Carlton 2x4 Ranch – <i>Arcadia</i><br>Barthle Brothers Ranch – <i>San Antonio</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>2014</b> | Agri-Starts, Inc. – <i>Apopka</i><br>Riverdale Potato Farm, Inc. – <i>Elkton</i><br>Milking R, Inc. – <i>Okeechobee</i>                                 | <b>2000</b> | Pacific Tomato Growers – <i>Palmetto</i><br>Evans Properties – <i>Vero Beach</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>2013</b> | Kissimmee Park Properties, LLC – <i>St. Cloud</i><br>Ferris Farms – <i>Floral City</i><br>Farmton Tree Farm – <i>Osteen</i>                             | <b>1999</b> | Two Rivers Ranch – <i>Thonotosassa</i><br>Lykes Bros. – <i>Okeechobee</i><br>Suwannee Farms -- <i>O'Brien</i>                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>2012</b> | Deroose Plants, Inc. – <i>Apopka</i><br>Southern Accent Farm – <i>Okeechobee</i>                                                                        | <b>1998</b> | Longino Ranch – <i>Arcadia</i><br>V&W Farms – <i>Avon Park</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>2011</b> | Straughn Farms, LLC – <i>Waldo</i>                                                                                                                      | <b>1997</b> | Anclote River Ranch – <i>Odessa</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>2010</b> | Saturiwa Conservation Area – <i>Elkton</i><br>3 Boys Farm – <i>Ruskin</i><br>Arapaho Citrus Management – <i>Fort Pierce</i>                             | <b>1996</b> | Edward "Jack" Campbell – <i>Homestead</i><br>Citrus World – <i>Lake Wales</i><br>Ekkwill Waterlife Resources – <i>Gibsonville</i>                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>2009</b> | Dairy Production Systems – <i>High Springs</i><br>Loop's Nursery – <i>Jacksonville</i>                                                                  | <b>1995</b> | Schroeder Manatee Ranch – <i>Bradenton</i><br>Burt McKee – <i>Tampa</i><br>Davie Dairy – <i>Okeechobee</i><br>O.F. Nelson and Sons Nursery – <i>Apopka</i><br>Bright Hour Ranch – <i>Arcadia</i><br>Deseret Ranches of Florida – <i>St. Cloud</i><br>Fulford Farms – <i>Monticello</i> |
| <b>2008</b> | Carroll Brothers Nursery – <i>Clearwater</i><br>Brock Family Farm – <i>Monticello</i>                                                                   | <b>1994</b> | Rafter T Cattle Company – <i>Avon Park</i><br>A. Duda and Sons – <i>Oviedo</i><br>Babcock Florida Company – <i>Punta Gorda</i><br>Gustafson's Dairy – <i>Green Cove Springs</i><br>Jon's Nursery – <i>Eustis</i><br>Adams Ranch – <i>Fort Pierce</i>                                   |
| <b>2007</b> | Butler Oaks Farm – <i>Lorida</i><br>Gwinn Brothers Farm – <i>McAlpin</i><br>Buck Island Ranch – <i>Lake Placid</i><br>Fraleigh Nursery – <i>Madison</i> |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |



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