





Dear Friends,

I am delighted to recognize Costa Farms as the recipient of the 2024 Commissioner's Agricultural Environmental Leadership Award. Over the last 60 years Costa Farms has grown from a small South Florida vegetable farm into a pillar of Florida's horticulture industry. The business has faced many challenges in that time,

including the complete devastation by Hurricane Andrew, but has had the resiliency to come back stronger than before. Today, the company places an emphasis on automation, environmentally friendly products, and sustainable cultivation practices. By committing to continuous improvement and prioritizing research and development, Costa Farms has been steadfast in advancing Florida agriculture while minimizing its ecological impact.

Since 1994, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has honored agricultural leaders who demonstrate innovation and forward-thinking strategies to protect the environment and conserve natural resources. It is a privilege to acknowledge the efforts of these environmental champions, whose dedication sets a high standard for agricultural stewardship. Their contributions help ensure the preservation of Florida's valuable natural resources for future generations.

Sincerely,

Wilton Simpson

Commissioner of Agriculture



COSTA FARMS

From its beginnings in 1961 as a 30-acre tomato farm in South Florida, Costa Farms has grown into a massive 5,200-acre horticultural enterprise, offering over 1,500 varieties of annuals, perennials, and ferns. Founded by Cuban immigrant Jose Costa Sr., this family-owned company oversees every phase of production, from greenhouse cultivation to retail, becoming one of the world's largest ornamental grower.



Under the leadership of CEO and 3rd generation family member Joche Smith, Costa Farms grows traditional plants for wholesale distribution and prides itself on constantly bringing in new varieties from around the globe. Above, Cesar Martinez (left), manager of the Delray operations, and Smith (right) at company headquarters in Miami.



Michael Rimland (right) travels the world in search of new cultivars for Costa Farms to propagate.



For over 25 years, Costa Farms has used coconut coir, a lightweight and water-absorbent agricultural byproduct, as its main substrate due to its moisture retention and pest-resistant properties. Coconut fiber also works well with the nursery's fertigation system and promotes healthy root growth. To boost sustainability, they've tested adding hydro fiber, rice hulls, and cotton gin waste to the mix.



The Ellepot system forms the coir into biodegradable plugs, eliminating the need for plastic pots. Seeds are planted by hand into smaller plugs, while larger seedlings are inserted mechanically into coir-filled trays. Automation plays a key role in producing large quantities of plants.





Costa Farms utilizes leading edge technology and Best Management Practices (BMPs) to guide water and fertilizer use. UVC lighting is used to control the growth of plant pathogens. Point source irrigation systems ensure precise water and nutrient delivery directly to plant roots, reducing waste and preventing runoff. Through AI and mobile apps, like its proprietary Greenhouse Guardian software, the operation's site in Venus has cut water usage by 24%.

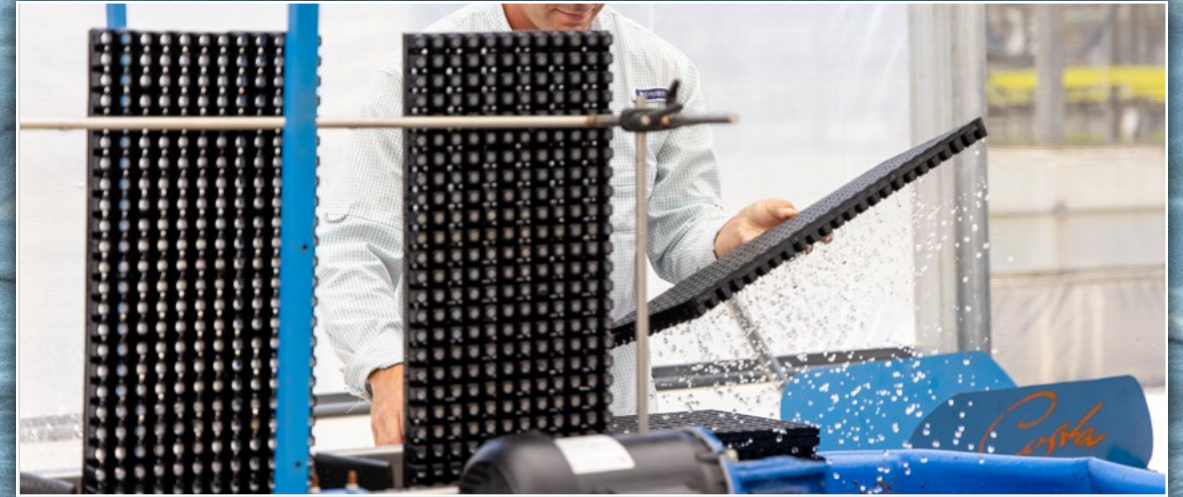
As environmental stewards, Costa strives to maintain balance at all their nursery locations. At their Venus site, the operation has created a network of ditches that direct water into retention ponds and eventually to wetlands. Along the way excess nutrients are naturally filtered out, before the water flows into nearby waterways like Fisheating Creek.



Maria Giuidici, Environmental Sustainability Manager tours a Homestead greenhouse with Andrew Blair, Project Manager in Foliage Operations.



Cesar Martinez talks with Kayla Nickerson of the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District.



Through its Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, Costa Farms reduces pesticide use by utilizing biological controls. To produce healthier, locally acclimated beneficials the company operates an insectary at their North Carolina farm with plans for one in Miami, and lab-grown beneficial fungi in both the Dominican Republic and Miami. Below, adhesive cards placed around the greenhouses help to identify which insects are present.



Waste reduction and recycling play a role in Costa's sustainability efforts. The company cleans and reuses trays to extend their lifecycle, reducing the need for new materials. In 2021, Costa Farms recycled 2,209 tons of plastic pots and trays, not only from its own operations but also by collecting recyclable materials from retail partners. These initiatives reflect the company's dedication to minimizing waste and promoting a circular economy within its horticultural processes.

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2023 Rocking K Cattle Company – *Odessa*
Brite Leaf Citrus Nursery – *Lake Panasoffkee*
Island Grove Wine Company – *Hawthorne*

2022 Lee Peanut Farms – *Lee*
The Groves of Peace River – *Zolfo Springs*
Usher Land and Timber – *Chiefland*

2021 The Jungle Nursery – *Homestead*
Tater Farms – *Hastings*
Brad Turner – *Lithia*

2019 Marshall Farms – *Baker*
Blue Sky Farms – *Elkton*
EIP Citrus Managment – *Polk*

2018 Tree-O-Groves – *Lake Alfred*
Wild Goose Farms – *Umatilla*
Blackbeards Ranch – *Myakka City*

2017 Florida Blue Farms – *Waldo*
Speedling – *Ruskin*
Cindale Farms – *Marianna*

2016 Jones Potato Farm – *Manatee and Hendry*
Cherrylake – *Groveland*
Alliance Dairies – *Trenton*

2015 Carlton and Carlton Ranch – *Hillsborough*
Dasher Farm – *McAlpin*
Bull Hammock Ranch – *Fort Pierce*

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*
Farmton 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*

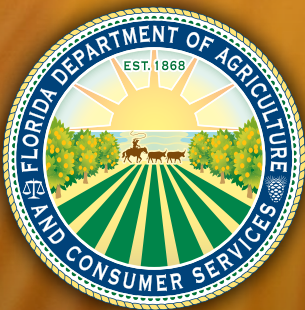
1998 Longino Ranch – *Arcadia*
V&W Farms – *Avon Park*

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*





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