

2017

Commissioner's **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 2017 Commissioner's Agricultural Environmental Leadership Award – Speedling, Inc., Florida Blue Farms, Inc., and Cindale Farms, LLC. 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,

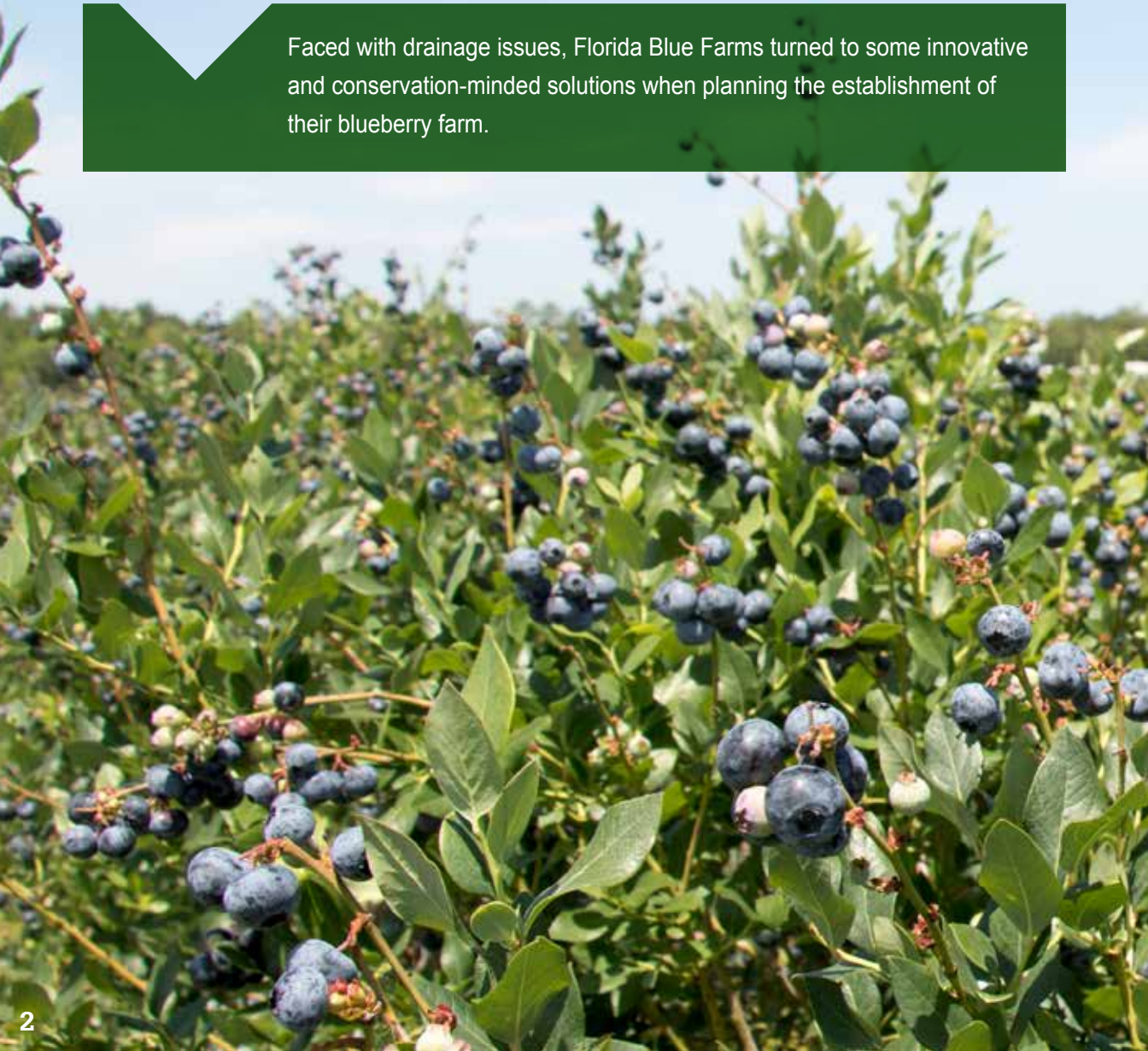
A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Adam H. Putnam".

Adam H. Putnam
Commissioner of Agriculture

Florida Blue Farms

Waldo

Faced with drainage issues, Florida Blue Farms turned to some innovative and conservation-minded solutions when planning the establishment of their blueberry farm.







Florida Blue Farms was established in 2010 by the Lee family. Located in Waldo, Florida – just outside of Gainesville – the farm began with 50 acres of Southern Highbush Blueberries. Today this family-run farm is currently undergoing a 20-acre expansion, increasing the farm to 110 acres.





Florida Blue's first harvest was in 2011. The harvest season begins in March and goes through early May each year, with harvesters collecting berries from sunup until sunset.



Florida Blue recognized drainage issues throughout the farm during the planning stages and with the aid of Gainesville engineer Ralph Eng, created a drainage system that channels water across weirs and through sediment basins into a 2-acre tailwater recovery pond. Below, Dennis Lee, Brittany H. Lee, and Ralph Eng survey the property.





Through innovation and Best Management Practices, the farm strives to preserve the property while maintaining its economic viability. Rip-rap berms reduce flows during heavy-drainage events and serve as ditch-blocks or dams to further enhance filtration and prevent erosion. Grassy filter strips help sponge up minimized nutrients and sediments.





Florida Blue Farms' tailwater recovery pond is also used to collect irrigation runoff that is then reapplied to its crops. This reduces the farm's aquifer withdrawals and improves offsite water quality.

The farm's conservation plan includes weather stations for accurate onsite weather conditions; drip irrigation; and ground cover to reduce irrigation needs and inputs.

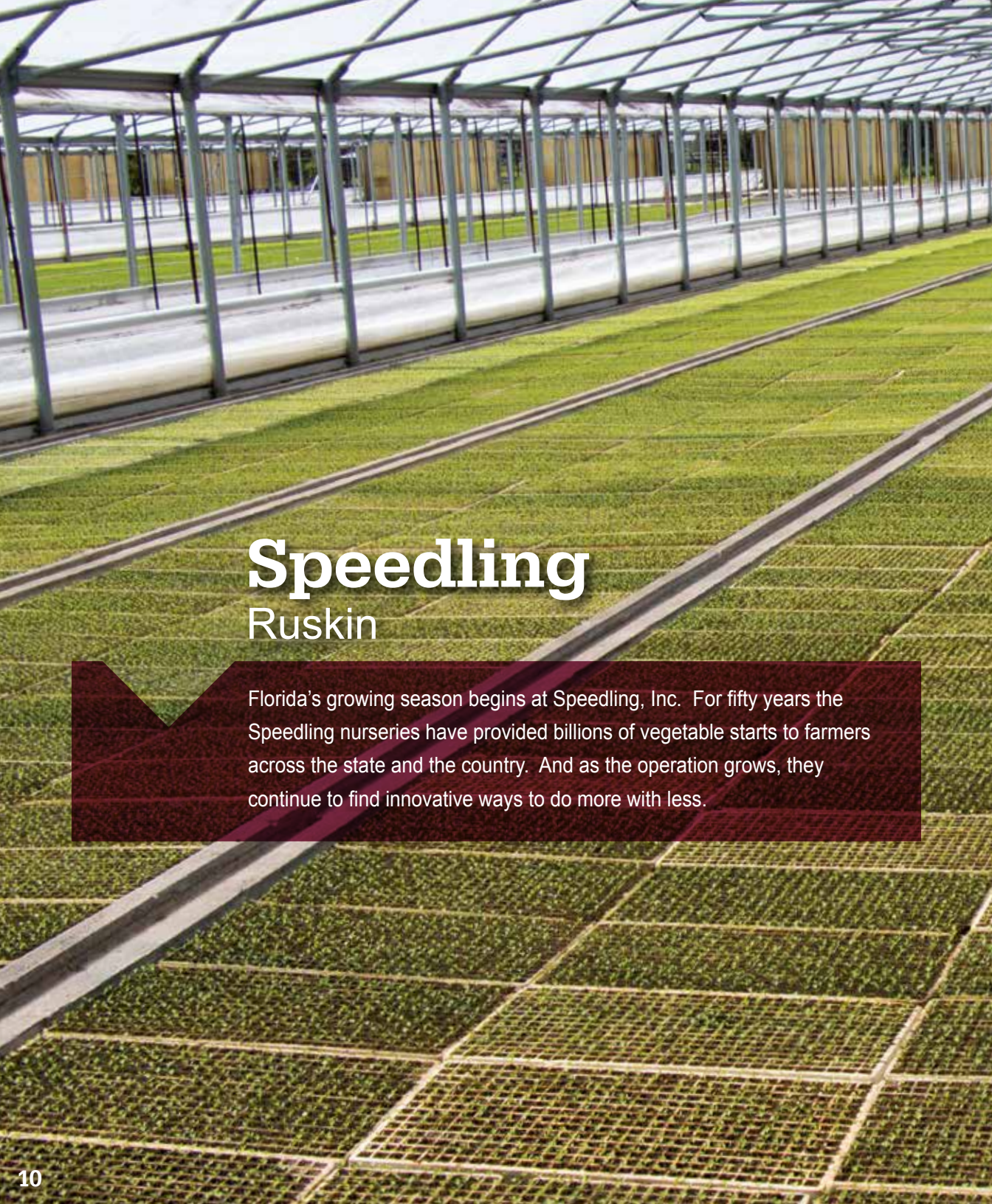




Brittany H. Lee, Vice President of Florida Blue Farms, reviews the day's operations with her mother Carrie, sister Prentiss, and brother Adam.

From left, Adam Lee, Morgan Lee (holding Austin Lee), Rob Ladkani (holding Dennis Ladkani), Prentiss Ladkani (holding Evan Lee), Brittany H. Lee (holding JEB Brown & Salma Ladkani), Ryan Brown (holding Carmen Ladkani), Carrie Lee, Dennis Lee.

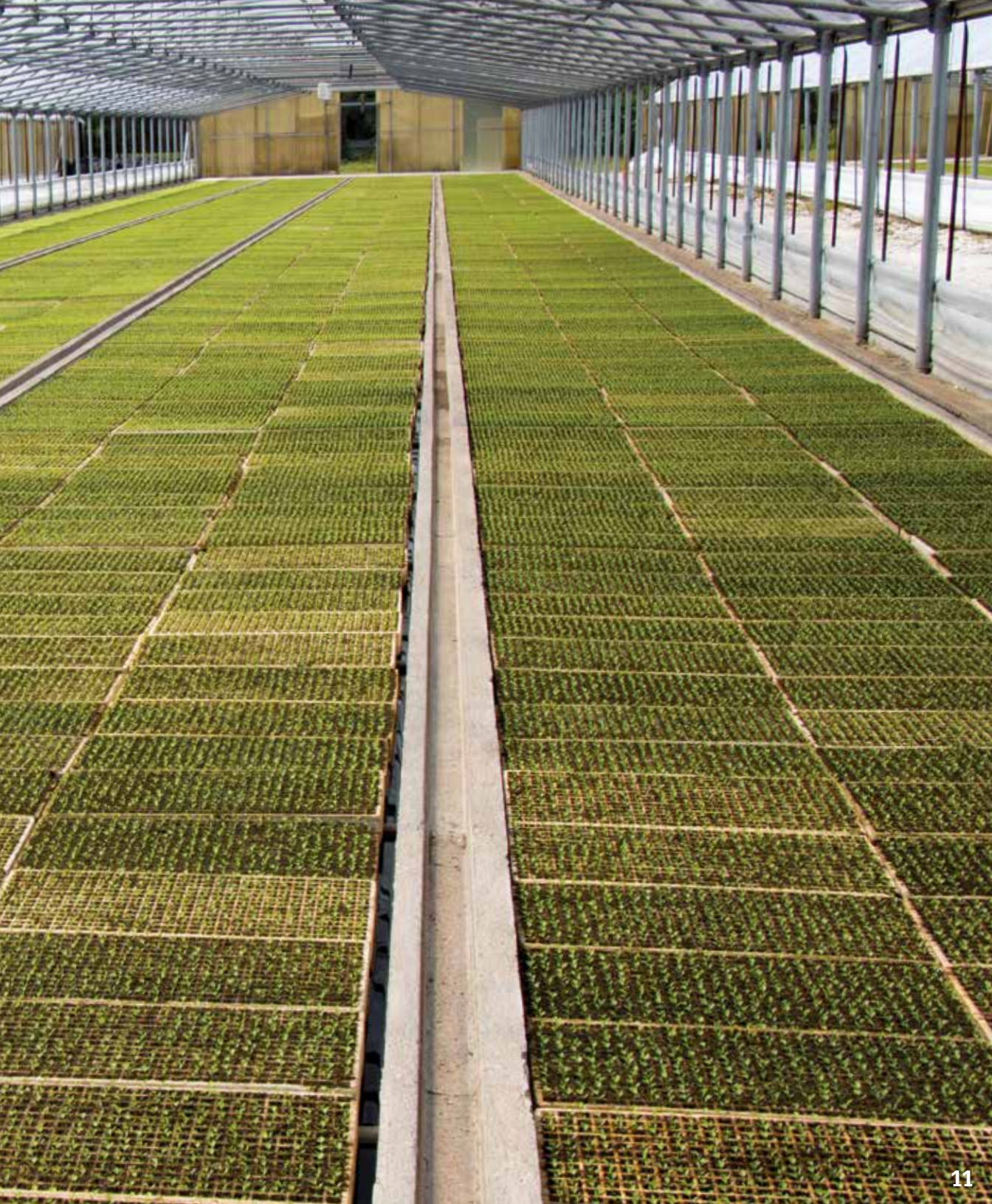


A large, modern greenhouse with a high, arched metal frame and translucent panels. Inside, the floor is covered with rows of green seedling trays, each containing small, young plants. The perspective is from a low angle, looking down the length of the greenhouse, with the rows of trays receding into the distance. The lighting is bright and even, highlighting the vibrant green of the seedlings.

Speedling

Ruskin

Florida's growing season begins at Speedling, Inc. For fifty years the Speedling nurseries have provided billions of vegetable starts to farmers across the state and the country. And as the operation grows, they continue to find innovative ways to do more with less.





Greg Davis is President and CEO of the “company that was started by farmers for farmers.” Established in Sun City in 1968, Speedling, Inc. has expanded to eight nurseries throughout the United States, including locations in Bushnell and Ruskin, its corporate headquarters.



Speedling produces a wide range of vegetable, ornamental, forestry, forage and specialty crops. If you eat celery anywhere in the country, there's a good chance it started at Speedling.



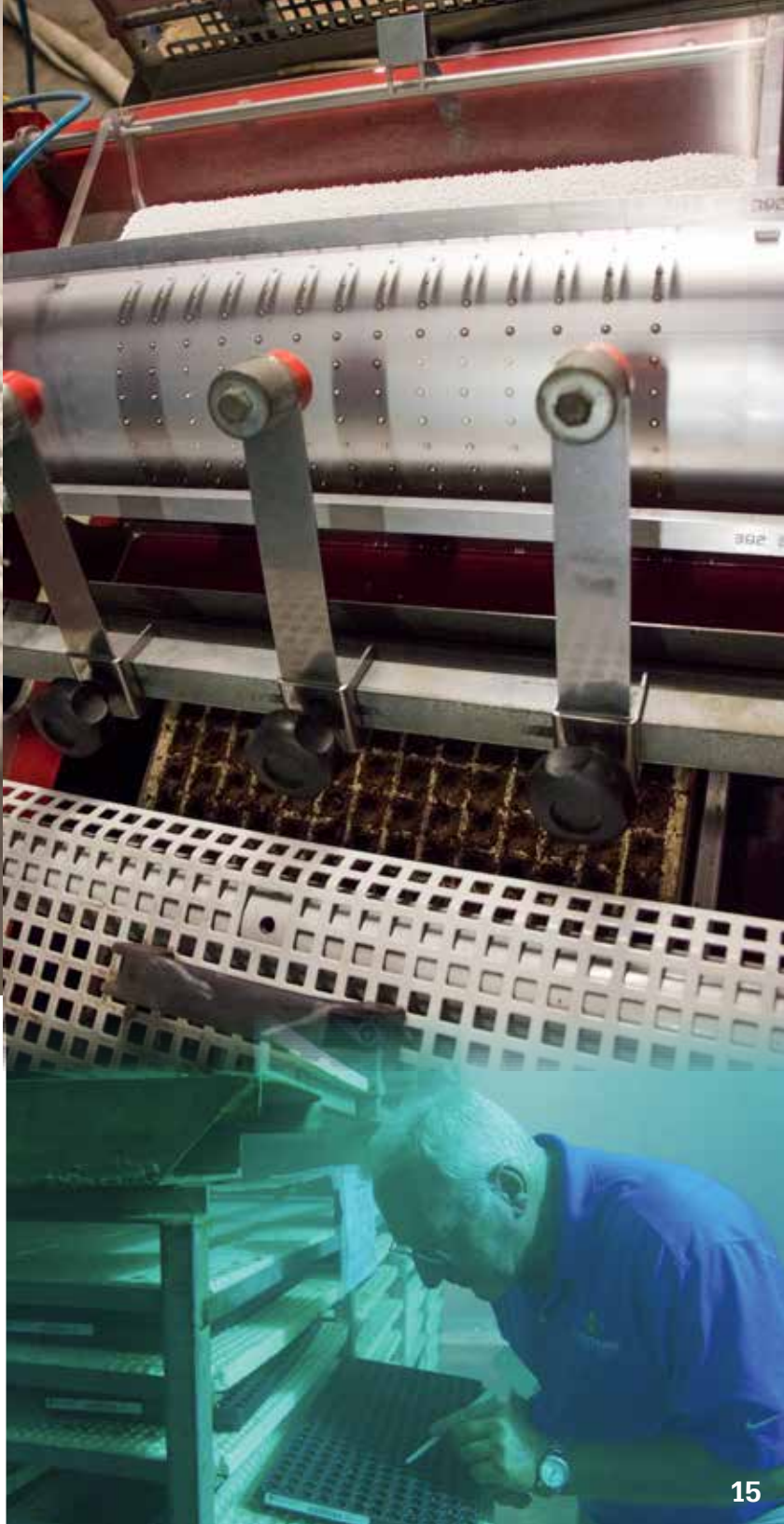


Their onsite EPS facility produces the industry standard “Speedling Flat,” a unique inverted-pyramid cell design that allows for stronger root systems. This improves survivability, reduces production costs, and allows for higher yields.





Each plant begins with a seed. And while the sheer volume of production is staggering, the operation monitors and controls each step of the process, from germination to sprouting, to ensure the healthiest plant possible.





Speedling uses Water-Quality Best Management Practices to reduce water consumption. At the Bushnell location, over four million gallons of water circulate throughout the 700,000 sq. feet of growing space. Through sub-irrigation the facility's water consumption dropped by 80 percent.





Suspended over large flumes, plants are watered from the roots up. Through a sub-irrigation system, flats of starters draw water up into each cell. Once every cell is equally saturated the water in the flumes is lowered.



Like water and green space, labor is fast becoming a limited resource for Florida farmers. Evolving to meet these challenges, Speedling is automating much of its process.





(Above) Team Speedling, Ruskin.

(Below) Team Speedling, Bushnell.





Cindale Farms

Marianna

Assuming leadership of the family dairy, Meghan and Brad Austin found innovative ways to enhance the performance of the dairy, while improving the farm's entire ecosystem. But it's the way they connect with consumers and share their farm's story that really sets them apart.





Nestled amidst beautiful rolling hills and natural springs near the quaint panhandle town of Marianna is Cindale Farms. This 467-acre family farm is home to 500 jersey and jersey cross cows, and young stock.





Meghan, a veterinarian, and Brad, a PhD in cattle reproduction and nutrition, met while attending the University of Florida. They returned to the family farm in 2010, where they now serve as managers.





Originally established by Meghan's parents, Cindy and Dale Eade, Cindale Farms has been producing milk for the Southeast since 1994. Dale and Brad worked with Tom Batey of the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District who helped them implement an intensive rotational grazing system that allows the cattle free access to a fresh grass paddock daily. This approach decreased feed costs while improving the farm's entire ecosystem.





Located in the middle of the property is Pearl Spring. Through careful stewardship, the dairy has worked with the Federal Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program to preserve this natural feature, giving home to an abundance of wildlife.



Southern Craft Creamery was founded by Meghan's sister, Lauren and brother-in-law, Zach O'Bryan (inset with their daughter, Finley) as a way to connect with their community. Today the creamery is operated by Cindy and Dale who continue to produce the handcrafted ice cream in a variety of unique local flavors.







While the brand enjoys a following across the Southeast, the family is currently in the process of opening an ice cream scoop shop in downtown Marianna to further share their ice cream and farm to table story.

From left, Brad Austin, Meghan Austin, Emma Austin, Cindy Eade, Dale Eade.



Previous Winners

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 Satriwa 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

