MEETING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF A GROWING INDUSTRY

SITUATION
The 2007 Agriculture Census ranked Marion County number one in small ruminant production, housing twenty-four percent of the state’s 2,001 farms. Throughout Florida, the growing demand of alternative red meat sources for health-conscious consumers has increased substantially. Other cultures including: Muslims, Hispanics, Caribbean Islanders, etc., have increased demand for sheep and goat meat. Escalating feed costs have made small ruminants a more economical option due to their ability to generate more cash-flow per acre, when compared to other large livestock.

METHODS
The Central Florida Livestock Agents Group (CFLAG) developed a one-day educational conference focusing on small ruminant production. Topics discussed ranged from small farm pasture management and fencing and round-table sessions to health and parasite control. The FAMACHA® parasite management certification was also offered. A farm tour and a chute-side animal handling demonstration were conducted during the conference. An evaluation was carried out to determine further educational needs for this demographic.

RESULTS
Survey response rate was thirty-nine percent (n=24). Ninety-six percent (n=22) indicated the information was useful. Eighty-seven percent (n=21) would consider implementing new farm management practice changes. Examples of practice change include: pasture management (n=8), improved parasite management (n=4) and herd nutrition (n=3).

CONCLUSION
The survey results indicated a significant need for more educational programs targeting sheep and goat ranchers in the State of Florida. Educational needs identified were; reproduction (n=6), herd health (n=3), financial management (n=3), nutrition (n=2), value added products (n=2). Based on this producer feedback, CFLAG will conduct an annual Small Ruminant Production Conference.

Figure 1
Small Farmer - 67%
Other - 22%
Homeowner - 11%

Figure 2
Pasture Improvement Practices - 67%
FAMACHA Card Use - 17%
FERT - 8%
Annual Soil Testing - 8%

Figure 3
Pasture Management - 67%
Paraicone Control - 36%
Legumes - 13%
Marketing - 9%
Farm Planning - 4%

Left. Flyer developed for promotion of the 2012 Small Ruminant Production Conference.
Top Right. Dr. Yvana C. Newman, UF/IFAS Forage Specialist addressing talking about legume varieties suited for small ruminant farms in Central Florida.
Bottom Right. Field visit to Fairmeadow Farms, Ocala as part of the program hands-on demonstration and tour.

Figure 1. Small farmers comprised the majority of the audience that attended the 2012 Small Ruminant Production Conference.
Figure 2. Top three practices that small ruminant producers would implement in their farm management would be: pasture improvement practices, parasite monitoring by using the FAMACHA® Card to monitor anemia and/or Fecal Egg Reduction Test (FERT), and annual soil testing.
Figure 3. Five critical educational areas were identified by a needs assessment survey done as part of the 2012 Small Ruminant Production Conference.

ONLINE TOOLS
As a result of the 2012 Small Ruminant Production Conference videos and proceedings on individual lectures were developed and now are available online at the CFLAG webpage:
http://cflag.ifas.ufl.edu/SmRuminantProdConf2012.shtml

These topics available online are the following:
- Small Ruminant Pasture Management,
- Manure Management and Best Management Practices for Small Farms,
- Niche Marketing and other Marketing Alternatives,
- Legumes for your Small Farm,
- Small Ruminant FAMACHA Certification,
- Keys to Successful Sheep and Goat Farming [panel discussion], and
- Forage for Goats: Planting for Browsing.