Like much of the state, Western Central Florida has experienced a boom in urban growth in the past decade, a trend which is expected to continue well into the future. With urban growth has come an increased incidence of negative rural-urban interface, often as a direct result of a lack of positive communication, proactive education and understanding between farming and non-farming populations. AGRItunity is a conference and tradeshow with the latest in agricultural technology, business information, and trends that will benefit agricultural operations large and small. As part of AGRItunity, put on by Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Pasco and Sumter County Extension Offices, two farm tours were implemented which exposed non-farming residents to farming culture and practices in an educational and entertaining format. Participants selected between tours focused on livestock or crop production, and visited a variety of local farms ranging from a traditional cow-calf operation to a tree nursery. Extension Agents, who served as bus tour guides, interacted with participants and provided informal education between stops. Of those surveyed (n=71), 100% reported a positive increase in knowledge of local agricultural production. Additionally, several indicated a desire to become advocates for agriculture in their neighborhoods and expressed their intentions of becoming more involved with their local county Extension offices. Programs like the AGRItunity Farm Tours can be implemented in other parts of the country to provide a spring board for the development of a more positive rural-urban interface. Likewise, individual producers who are farming on the fringe of urban development may consider hosting field days to educate their new neighbors on the many benefits of living in areas with active farm economies.

Contact Information: Susan Kelly, UF/IFAS Sumter County Extension Office, 7620 SR 471 #2, Bushnell, FL, 33513, USA. Phone: 352-793-2728; Email: sakelly@ufl.edu