



Florida Agriculture  
in the Classroom, Inc.  
AGRICULTURE KEEPS  
FLORIDA GREEN

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**SOUTH FLORIDA TEACHER WINS NATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN  
TEACHING ABOUT AGRICULTURE AWARD FOR 2012**

**GAINESVILLE** – Thomas Gantt, a high school biology and chemistry teacher in Miami, won the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) and the National Agriculture in the Classroom’s Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award for the Southern Region for 2012.

Thomas Gantt, a teacher at iPreparatory Academy, uses biology, chemistry and research concepts to educate his students about agriculture. Gantt’s “Worms in Space” project allowed students to observe the corn ear worm and the impacts outside influences have on its development including zero gravity.

Gantt won Florida Agriculture in the Classroom’s high school award and overall Florida award. He joins three other Florida teacher winners, namely Barbara Wilcox, a kindergarten teacher in Brevard County, who won for the elementary level, Melissa Raulerson, a science teacher in Hernando County who won for the middle school level and Becky Whitmer-Sponholtz, an agri-science teacher in Clay County, who won for the middle school agri-science level.

“We are lucky to have teachers who are so passionate about Florida agriculture,” said Jennifer W. Sills, chairwoman and Dairy Council of Florida representative for Florida Agriculture in the Classroom. “Their dedication and use of innovative lessons and ideas allows their students to learn about agricultural concepts in real life situations.”

Gantt used his “Worms in Space” project to grab students’ attention. “Working in a truly urban setting in downtown Miami, most students are unaware of the huge agricultural

endeavors taking place in Miami-Dade County and Florida. I wish to expose students to the world outside of our school,” he wrote in his application.

Wilcox, a 15-year teaching veteran, uses multiple gardens, including ABC gardens, tea gardens and butterfly gardens at Endeavour Elementary in Cocoa to help teach her students about agriculture.

"Teaching through gardening and agriculture incorporates hands-on, real-life opportunities that integrate all levels of the curriculum through all the senses. It promotes positive impacts on learning, citizenship skills, healthy living and earth care responsibilities. But maybe most importantly, it makes learning FUN," wrote Wilcox in her application.

Melissa Raulerson, a middle school science teacher at Gulf Coast Academy of Science and Technology in Spring Hill, started educating students about agriculture with the use of Earth Boxes that were funded with a grant from Florida Agriculture in the Classroom.

Becky Whitmer-Sponholtz, a middle school agri-science teacher at Keystone Heights Junior/Senior High School, implemented a program called "Farm Days" at her school where local elementary students visit an agricultural land lab to experience hands-on learning activities led by her middle school students. She and her middle school students use activities from Florida Agriculture in the Classroom's Make-N-Take booklet with the elementary students.

Gantt, Wilcox, Raulerson and Whitmer-Sponholtz will be honored at the National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference "Rendezvous in the Rockies" in Loveland, Colorado June 19-22.

Florida Agriculture in the Classroom is a non-profit organization based in Gainesville. Its mission is to help teachers in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade educate students about the where their food, fiber and fuel comes from. It receives funding from sales of the agriculture specialty license plate called the "Ag Tag".

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND PHOTOS OF TEACHER WINNERS,  
CONTACT LISA GASKALLA OR HOLIDAY GRIFFIN BY CALLING (352) 846-1391  
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