



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

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**FLORIDA AGRICULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM SELECTS FOUR TEACHERS FOR
2014 EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING ABOUT AGRICULTURE AWARD**

GAINESVILLE – A South Florida high school chemistry teacher who shows students how to power a go-kart with bio diesel they make from corn and sunflower seed oil is the overall winner of Florida Agriculture in the Classroom’s (FAITC) 2014 Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award.

Gustavo Junco, an advanced placement chemistry teacher at West Broward High School in Pembroke Pines in Broward County, won for the high school level and overall Florida level.

He joins three other teachers selected for FAITC’s Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Awards for this year – Katrina Madok, an elementary gifted teacher at Gerald Adams Elementary in Key West; Katie Schlotterbeck, a middle school science teacher at St. Michael Lutheran School in Fort Myers; and Erin Verplanck Smith, a middle school agri-science teacher at Keystone Heights Junior Senior High School in Clay County.

“These teachers exemplify what Florida Agriculture in the Classroom is looking for in award winning teachers,” said Ken Barton, chairman of Florida Agriculture in the Classroom and executive director of the Florida Peanut Producers. “They use agriculture-related themes to teach language arts, math, science and social studies, which helps make these subjects more relevant to students.”

“Teachers’ use of these concepts gives students a general understanding of the vital role agriculture plays in students’ daily lives,” Barton said, “and a more in-depth study of the complicated processes involved in the life sciences.”

Ten-year teaching veteran Junco teaches agro ecology and advanced placement chemistry to 10th, 11th and 12th graders at West Broward High School. His chemistry students grow sunflowers in a school garden, and extract oil from the seeds that is then converted into biodiesel to fuel the go-kart they built. His honors chemistry class takes it one step further and experiments with turning sugarcane juice into cellulosic ethanol. In addition, one student has turned the cellulosic ethanol project into a science fair experiment in which she will try to determine the method that produces the highest concentration of glucose.

“Agriculture can provide us with inexpensive renewable energy,” Junco wrote in his application. “My students and I have researched and experimented on biodiesel, ethanol and cellulosic ethanol as viable forms of renewable energy.”

FAITC’s elementary winner, Katrina Madok, teaches all subject areas to kindergarten through fifth grade gifted students at Gerald Adams Elementary in Key West in Monroe County. She uses hands-on experiments in which students germinate seeds taken from fruits and vegetables they eat at lunch, and then grow more fruits and vegetables from these seeds in a mini hydroponics station.

For middle school science winner, Katie Schlotterbeck, a 30-year teaching veteran at St. Michaels Lutheran in Fort Myers in Lee County, students grow fruits and vegetables using different growing systems. In addition, she invites a local mosquito control entomologist into her classroom to discuss mosquito control methods, which leads into discussions about agricultural pests and presentations of FAITC lessons “What is a Pest?” “Insects,” and “Integrated Pest Management.” Her students also participated in an experiment to curb an outbreak of air potatoes on their school campus. They worked with local U.S. Department of Agriculture representatives to release air potato leaf beetles to attack these pests.

Erin Verplanck Smith, an agri-science teacher at Keystone Heights Junior Senior High School in Clay County in North Central Florida, has her students reach out to local elementary students with a program called “Farm Days.” These younger students visit an agricultural land laboratory and learn about local commodities by visiting different stations manned by Smith’s students. In addition, Smith’s students travel to local elementary schools and help the younger students plant school gardens.

The four winning teachers will receive all expenses paid trips to the 2014 National Agriculture in the Classroom National Conference “The Sweet Story of Agriculture” June 23-27 in Hershey, PA.

FAITC is a Gainesville-based, non-profit organization that is charged with educating pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students about the importance of Florida agriculture. It does so by providing teachers and agriculture industry volunteers with curricula, materials, workshops, grants and programs such as the Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award and Florida Agriculture Literacy Day. It is funded by sales of the agriculture specialty license plate called the ‘Ag Tag.’

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