



**FLORIDA**  
**Agriculture**  
**IN THE CLASSROOM**

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**FLORIDA AGRICULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM SELECTS  
FOUR TEACHER AWARD WINNERS FOR 2016**

**GAINESVILLE** – A special education teacher from the Panhandle, a middle school STEAM instructor from South Florida, a middle school agri-science teacher from Northeast Florida and high school horticulture teacher from South Florida have won Florida Agriculture in the Classroom’s Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award for 2016.

The Gainesville-based, non-profit organization selected the four instructors from a field of candidates because they best exemplified teachers who use agriculture in their general education instruction.

“These teachers personify what we’re looking for in our teacher winners: Educators who use real-life agricultural concepts to teach reading, writing, math, science and other general education subjects,” said Tamara Wood, chairman of the FAITC board of directors and a representative of Florida Citrus Mutual. “We’re proud of them, and excited to celebrate their achievements at the national conference.”

Ronda Curtis, a special education instructor for kindergarten through fifth grade at Bagdad Elementary in Milton in the Panhandle, won the award for the elementary level and is the overall Florida winner. She will compete for the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award for 2016.

She joins three other teacher award winners for Florida: middle school award winner Scott Savett of Parkway Middle School in Lauderhill in Broward County; middle school agri-science winner Jill Sullivan of Mayport Coastal Sciences Middle School in Jacksonville in Duval County; and high school winner Cynthia Nowicki of Whispering Pines School in Hollywood in Broward County.

All four winners will be recognized at the 2016 National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference ‘Agriculture Blooming in the Desert’ June 22-24, 2016 in Litchfield Park, AZ near Phoenix.

Curtis uses a school garden at Bagdad Elementary as an “outdoor classroom to increase agricultural literacy through the five senses as it relates to food, health and lifestyle.” Her special needs students learn about plant growth by labeling the parts of the plant, describing the flowers, diagramming the garden layout, comparing hydroponics and traditional growing methods and discussing the nutritional benefits of fruit and vegetables.

“We celebrate our ‘learning’ by hosting an annual Garden Open House,” Curtis wrote in her application, “and an annual Thanksgiving feast. Many of the fruit and vegetables from our garden are cooked and served. We celebrate our agriculture journey!”

Savett teaches the STEAM disciplines of science, technology, engineering, art and math by using the school garden at Parkway Middle. His students develop a hydroponics

system to deliver nutrients to plants efficiently, and solar panels to power this hydroponics system, among other efforts.

Sullivan's students at Mayport Coastal Sciences Middle School participate in a lesson she developed in which they evaluate the effects a nearby National Marine Sanctuary designation has on the local shrimping industry. Her students debate the importance of the seafood industry to the local economy and the need to protect marine life.

Nowicki uses several outdoor classrooms or school gardens to teach the life sciences using plants and insects, the study of plants as the source of energy for humans and animals and the engineering of vertical growing systems and irrigation systems, among other projects.

FAITC funds programs like the Florida Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Awards with the proceeds it receives from sales of the agriculture specialty license plate known as the Ag Tag. Its mission is to educate K-12 teachers and students about the source of their food, fiber and fuel, and it does so by providing curriculum, workshops and farm tours, awards programs, grants and elementary reading programs such as Florida Agriculture Literacy Day.

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