



FLORIDA
Agriculture
IN THE CLASSROOM

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FLORIDA AGRICULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM SELECTS
THREE AWARD WINNERS FOR 2019

GAINESVILLE – A team of elementary teachers from Orange County, a K-8 STEM coordinator from Duval County and a middle school agriscience teacher from Sarasota County have won Florida Agriculture in the Classroom’s (FAITC) Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Awards for 2019.

The Gainesville-based, non-profit organization, Florida Agriculture in the Classroom, selected the winners from a field of candidates because they best exemplified teachers who use agriculture in their yearlong instruction. “These teachers are going above and beyond the classroom with their use of experiential learning and FAITC is honored to be able to recognize them for their hard work.” said Carol Roe, Chairman of the FAITC Board of Directors and a representative of Wm. G. Roe & Sons, Inc.

The Eco Club teachers at Millennia Gardens Elementary; Dawn Chehab, Joshua Garrett, Erica Roberts, John Martinez and Nicholas Zebroski, have been chosen as the overall Florida winner and will go on to compete for the National Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award for 2019. The Eco Club team will be joined by two other teacher award winners for Florida: K-8 STEM coordinator, Suzette Gagnon, of Christ the King Catholic School in Jacksonville and middle school agriscience teacher, Deb Walker, of Sarasota Military Academy Prep in Sarasota. All winners receive a free trip to the National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference where they are recognized and a \$500 honorarium. The 2019 National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference ‘Agventure in the Natural State’ is June 18-21, 2019 in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Eco Club at Millennia Gardens Elementary is an environmentally dedicated group of students and educators in Orlando, who seek to educate the community, empower students and staff and make stewardship of our Earth a priority through intensive hands-on projects and outreach activities. In the two years of the club’s existence they have established programs such as; a 50-tower hydroponic garden that supplies SeaWorld’s Manatee Rescue Center with romaine lettuce, a five bike Pedal-A-Watt System that powers the garden’s irrigation system and a food recycling program that has diverted 8,000 tons of solid food waste to date, just to name a few.

Suzette Gagnon, a K-8 STEM coordinator and Engineering/STEM teacher at Christ the King Catholic School in Jacksonville, has developed data driven projects for every grade level that relate to agriculture and the environment. Kindergarten students grow milkweed and tag and monitor butterflies, first grade students grow two different types of lettuce for the “salad party”

and to feed the chickens, second grade students run the composting station, third grade students maintain a weather station, fourth grade students maintain and monitor two solar panels, fifth grade students plant, maintain and harvest the raised bed garden, sixth students do a year long study on the creek and wetlands on the school grounds, seventh grade students “run” a not for profit business called ‘Seeds of Faith’ and the eighth grade students do engineering projects to maintain the raised bed gardens.

Deb Walker, a middle school agriscience teacher at Sarasota Military Academy in Sarasota, teaches her middle school students the importance of their generation to feed the growing population in our future. Her students are taught how to research, plan, experiment and evaluate different agriculture methods to achieve success. Deb also teaches her students about astrobotany and her school was accepted into the NASA Growing Beyond Earth Projects where NASA sends vegetable seeds to middle schools to germinate and grow plants under various conditions. Plants that do well are tested at Kennedy Space Center and then sent to the International Space Station.

FAITC funds programs like the Florida Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Awards with the proceeds it receives from the sales of the agriculture specialty license plate known as the Ag Tag. Its mission is to increase agricultural literacy through PreK-12 education and does so by providing curriculum, workshops, farm tours, award programs, grants and the elementary reading program, Florida Agriculture Literacy Day.

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