

January 30, 2012

Region 3 Report - Bob Lyme

Hello again from south FL.:

The 2012 IFF workshop this past week was attended by 83 flying farmers. On Tuesday we toured Palm Beach County just east of Belle Glade, Florida where the main crops are sugar cane and vegetables. The Sugarcane Growers Cooperative of Florida were our hosts for the sugarcane part of the tour; which was narrated Barbara Miedema, a lady that works for the Co-op and two University of FL. Agricultural Extension Agents, Ron Rice and Les Baucum. These three were the ones that made the tour outstanding with their presentation. [They "knew their stuff"]

We were on two busses, the first stop was at a field where harvesting was in progress. We got off the busses and they stopped the harvesters so everyone could get a close look at the machines. The harvester costs \$330,000 are very large machines on tracks that harvests only one row. Leaving the fields we went to one of their sugar warehouses and saw huge stockpiles of raw sugar that had been extruded from the cane. The raw sugar is then moved to a refinery where it is refined into crystal white sugar. Domino's uses the sugar we saw in their products. After the sugar and cane molasses is extracted the remains of the stalk is utilized so there is no waste.

Then to a box lunch and audio and video presentation by the two Ag. Extension Agents at the U/FL. Everglades Research and Communications Center. Next we went to TKM which is owned by five brothers that grow all kinds of lettuce. Steve Bashore, one of the owners, got on the bus and told us about the 7,000 acres of lettuce they grow as we drove slowly through the fields.

An interesting point was brought up, the farmers in the EAA area [Everglades Agricultural Area] pay a privilege to farm tax of \$34 per acre to be used for restoration of the everglades. Many of the farmers on the tours mouths were watering when they saw the black organic muck soil. The average price of land is around \$10,000 per acre, some as high as \$15,000.

On Wednesday we took an inland cruise where we saw homes in the \$30 million dollar bracket and private boats exceeding \$200 million dollars. All I could think of where did all that money come from and what a waste. Then we had lunch [dinner for us farm folk] at a restaurant called The Cheesecake Factory. After "lunch" we went to Butterfly World where we saw butterflies of all colors and sizes. I did learn a butterfly's life span is just a few days. Thanks to Gene Shore for hosting the Workshop and arranging the tours Wednesday.

Our next fly-in here in Florida is Feb. 11th at Sally and Don Apple's home near Dundee FL.

Till next time, may God Bless You and may God Bless America
Bob Lyme