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## **What is the Extension Service?**

By: Janet Bargar, Water Quality Agent

When I tell people during casual conversations that I work for the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension Service, their first reaction is usually a puzzled look. I quickly came to the conclusion that many people do not know about the wealth of information the Extension Service has to offer or even what it is all about.

The UF/IFAS Extension Service works in cooperation with county government, the United States Department of Agriculture, and Florida A & M University to provide Floridians with lifelong learning programs. These programs include sustainable agriculture, teaching environmental stewardship, understanding food nutrition and safety, consumer and parenting skills, and providing leadership for youth development with programs like 4-H.

UF/IFAS Extension establishes a link between the public and research conducted on campus and at research and education centers by partnering with local government, advisory committees, concerned citizens, commodity groups, and the youth of Florida. Each of Florida's 67 counties has an office and offers a wide range of educational programs that responds to the local needs of residents, schools, regulatory agencies, community organizations, and industry.

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One need that has been recently expressed along the Treasure Coast is the health of the Indian River Lagoon, which stretches 156 miles along Florida's East Coast from just south of Daytona Beach to just north of West Palm Beach. In order to help reduce the negative impact of human activities on the lagoon, UF/IFAS Extension Service provides residents information about water quality issues. Programs such as Florida Yards and Neighborhoods inform homeowners through "Nine Principles" how to reduce fertilizer, pesticide, and water use in their yards.

These practices in turn reduce the amount of pollutants flowing into the lagoon in stormwater runoff. The Extension Service is also educating residents about the delicate balance of the Indian River Lagoon and everything it has to offer as being the most diverse estuary in the United States.

I encourage you to use the services offered by your local extension office. You will be given useful information that will help you. To find your local Extension office, check the county listing in your telephone directory or visit the UF/IFAS website at [www.ifas.ufl.edu](http://www.ifas.ufl.edu) .