

## Blueberry Demonstration Planting

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Hastings and the surrounding area between the St. John's River and the Atlantic Ocean may offer a climate that is suitable for southern highbush blueberry production. The winters usually receive adequate chilling and the impacts of spring frosts may be reduced due to the moderating effects of large bodies of water nearby. Currently a variety of soil management, irrigation, and fertilization programs are used in commercial blueberry production in Florida with varying levels of efficiency and sustainability. A southern highbush blueberry planting was established at the UF Partnership for Water, Agriculture and Community Sustainability at the Hastings downtown facility to evaluate the feasibility of blueberry as an alternative crop for the region and to compare and contrast production systems using different irrigation systems and fertilization delivery methods. An overarching goal is to demonstrate improved fertilizer and water use efficiency through use of fertigation and low volume irrigation. Two cultivars, 'Emerald' and 'Jewel', which comprise the majority of commercial acreage in Florida, were used. All rows were bedded to improve drainage. Three soil management systems commonly used for blueberry production in Florida were established – 1) pine bark beds consisting of approximately 6 inches of pine bark placed on top of the soil; 2) pine bark incorporated beds consisting of three inches of pine bark incorporated into the top six inches of soil; and 3) pine bark incorporated beds covered with woven ground fabric. Three irrigation methods were used – 1) overhead sprinklers; 2) microsprinklers with a downward deflection spray pattern; and 3) drip. Drip irrigation was used only in combination with the pine bark incorporated beds covered with woven ground fabric. Two common fertilizer delivery methods, dry granular and fertigation, will be compared. The site will be used for regional workshops, field days, and demonstrations.