

# Florida Olive Report

## First Olive Crop for Hardee County

"It's been a long grind but we are beginning to see some progress," said Bill Lambert, Economic Development Director of the [Hardee County Industrial Development Authority](#) in Wauchula.

Five years ago, Lambert and his team had a dream: to establish an agricultural research facility for Hardee County to explore alternative crops. "With the citrus situation; we think it makes good farming sense to explore new cash crops on a limited scale," Lambert said recently.

With support from the Hardee County Commission, [Florida Olive Council](#) and [UF-IFAS](#), Lambert and his team went to work in 2016 on an abandoned citrus grove northwest of Wauchula. The 20a grove, like many in the County, had succumbed to HLB disease. In addition to installing plots of Pongamia, Hops and Pomegranate, the Hardee research team installed 2,000 olive trees.

Although Hurricanes in 2017 (Irma) and 2018 (Michael) damaged many of those olive trees; most fully recovered and are starting to bloom and bear fruit.

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Olive harvest at Hardee County farm

## FAMU Establishes Olive Research



Dr. Alejandro Bolques

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) has established an olive research site at the [FAMU Research & Extension Center](#) in Quincy. With assistance from Florida Olive Council, FAMU acquired 100 olive trees of 20 varieties. A test plot was established in 2019 and the first blooms appeared this year. Dr. Alejandro Bolques is leading the olive research effort supported by the Quincy team.

### FAMU Olive Research Team



**I-r: G. Bryant, J. Pardi, W. Diedrick, F. Ospina and A. Bolques**

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**Hardee County Olive Team**

I-r A. Blaus, E. Albritton, T. Watkins

*(Often takes 4-5 years for an olive tree fully to mature and produce.)*

Myles Albritton, the Hardee County research farm manager, explained European varieties like Arbequina and Koroneiki generally require 200-300 annual chill hours to reliably bloom and fruit in commercial quantities.



Myles Albritton, Research Farm Mgr.

**AgroClimate** says Hardee County's historical chill hour average is 241 hours, a recent warming trend (2020=161; 2019=143) hurt production. Albritton, a life-long citrus grower, believes proper nutrition, pruning and other cultivation practices may somewhat mitigate the issue of chilling. New varieties from warmer climates are also under review at Wauchula.



Low Chill Variety Research

"Since we don't get anywhere near 300 chill hours in Hardee County lately we are exploring other methods to increase reliable commercial production," Albritton added. In addition to selected older European trees that demonstrate good year-over-year production, Albritton has seen blooms this year on several North African varietal grafts. These varieties are from latitudes similar to Wauchula (27 degrees N) and hold the possibility of commercial production using less than 200 chill hours.



Hardee Olive Oil

This year (August 2021) the Hardee County team harvested several hundred pounds of olives from 164 primarily Arbequina; some fruit on Koroneiki and Chiquitita trees. **Johnson Harvesting** of Hardee County did the picking and The **Florida Olive Grove** near Brooksville milled the oil. By all accounts the oil is excellent quality. Lambert, however, remains cautious. "We did fairly good this year, but let's see how next year goes."

**President's Corner**

Dr. Kevin Folta (UF-IAS), a noted genetic scientist, is experimenting with a gene editing technology (CRISPR-Cas9) to develop a low chill olive variety for Florida. Unlike "gene splicing" where a gene from one organism is inserted into a different organism, CRISPR gene editing enables the installation of gene variants that influence key production traits (e.g. chilling requirement, fruit size, disease resistance) based on natural variations observed in plants. Folta's spectacular success with strawberries and other crops holds promise. Please financially support Dr. Folta's important work either through the **Florida Olive Council** or directly [kfolta@ufl.edu](mailto:kfolta@ufl.edu). Thank You.

Michael O'Hara Garcia  
FL Olive Council President