

The University of Florida North Florida Research Center - Suwannee Valley (NFREC-SV) in Live Oak, FL recently recognized Betty O'Toole of Madison, FL with the 2009 NFREC-SV Hall of Fame Award. This recognition is given to individuals who have provided support, guidance and inspiration to the faculty and staff at the center resulting in improved educational programs for farmers and ranchers in the Suwannee Valley area.

Betty is the owner of O'Toole's Herb Farm - a certified organic herb nursery and gardens business located on the outskirts of Madison. The farm was created by Betty O'Toole and her late husband Jim. The farm primarily sells herb and vegetable plants and Shitake mushrooms as well as providing agritourism opportunities. There are two quaint Cracker houses that have been moved onto the farm and converted into shops and office space. Display gardens, a shade area and two greenhouses are open to the public. The business is situated in the middle of a farm owned by Betty's family since the early 1840's.

The O'Toole family has worked with the University of Florida/IFAS with a variety of research projects since 1999. They have cooperated with UF/IFAS on organic transplant production and use of alternative production systems and media in addition to providing plant material for the center to conduct research projects.

Betty has served on the advisory committee at the North Florida Research and Education Center - Suwannee Valley as well as the Stakeholder Committee for the Small Farms Conference. She has been a speaker at various short courses, trade shows and trainings given and supported by the Suwannee Valley Center. Additionally, she has hosted the American Society for Plasticulture and has been hosting Master Gardeners and garden clubs for many years. Her workshops and events, at which many IFAS faculty have given presentations, offer a wide range of topics which draw thousands annually. Betty is a valuable resource for the "Herb" topic section for the Small Farms web site. Betty's involvement in her community and her belief in the value of what IFAS has to offer that community, have proven to be valuable in the development and delivery of a wide variety of educational programs.

Betty O'Toole is the sixth recipient of the NFREC-SV Hall of Fame Award.