County Agent supports local food movement

The original "county agent" dealt with agricultural issues such as how to increase crop production and better manage insect and disease problems on crops.

This continues to be the mission of any agriculture agent if the county is involved in crop production. Until a few years ago, Nassau County had several dairy and chicken farms in which the agriculture agent provided vital research-based information to help make each of the farms successful.

However, with the economic down swing a few years ago, we lost our crop and livestock production here. So, exactly what does the agriculture/natural resource agent do in Nassau County? We must be constantly changing and adapting to the way agriculture changes.

At this point, Nassau has a need for a small farms agent. This specifically means we need someone who can help the "hobby" farmer who has 5 to 55 acres or more.

The average value of agriculture products sold per farm equals $87,291. Most of the farms located in Nassau County are owned and operated by single families or private individuals. These new farmers have a desire to make their farm productive and viable to the local community.

There is a strong sentiment to produce food locally and keep it local. Several farmers want to produce something to be sold at near by fresh markets, restaurants or grocery stores. These farmers need tried and true methods for small crop production to fill special niche markets. What better source than an agriculture agent from the University of Florida or Florida A&M?

The modern agriculture agent uses the resources from the University of Florida to help with a business plan, marketing advice, and Best Management Practices (BMP) to reduce fertilization costs, water usage and protect the environment from inappropriate pesticide teacher and runoff.

The agriculture agent must be an excellent diagnostician to recognize and prevent devastation of loss of production.

This innovative agriculture agent also assists the local small farm owner with compliance to state laws so the farmer can obtain necessary pesticide licenses.

Oh, and one more thing, like all faculty for the University of Florida, the agriculture agent also contributes some of their time to working with the 4-H youth program.

In 1915, Nassau County's first county agent, James Shaw, focused primarily on assisting farmers.