

# Researchers taking new approach to Florida flavors

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Research has never tasted so good. The University of Florida, home to the inventors of Gatorade, is shaking up how it introduces new Florida crops, including fruits and vegetables.

Normally, scientists develop products through extensive research that primarily takes place in a lab. At UF's Plant Innovation Program in Gainesville, taste takes on a bigger role.

The main goal "is to make [fruits and vegetables](#) look, smell and taste good," said program director Dave Clark. "If we don't have that right, no amount of research is going to matter."

A part of UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, the program also brings together faculty from different departments and colleges across campus. Their input, Clark said, is vital to the growth of Florida agricultural research.

Clark's team put their food through a recent taste test, inviting food-industry experts, chefs, farmers, scientists and media to UF's presidential mansion to sample 14 small-plate courses all featuring Florida foods.

On the terraced back patio of the stately red-brick home, diners noshed on dishes that included lobster and SunLite mashed potatoes; tomato and peach gazpacho; shrimp with fire-roasted sweet corn and tomato grits; and strawberry limone basil sorbet.

Representing some of the latest initiatives of the Plant Innovation Program, the evening's menu also showcased blueberries, strawberries, tomatoes, Mandarin oranges, peaches, basil, sweet corn and a "triploid hybrid lemonlime."

While UF's Flavors of Florida dinner received rave reviews, much more is at stake. The state's 47,500 farms produce nearly 300 products on more than 9 million acres. The agriculture industry employs about 2 million people and contributes more than \$104 billion to the state's economy each year, according to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Harry Klee, a UF professor of horticulture who has worked for more than a decade to create consumer-pleasing tomato flavors, says this approach has many benefits including bolstering local economies and encouraging healthful lifestyles.

"If food tastes better, consumers will buy it," said Klee. "With any luck that can also lead to shoppers making choices that are better for them at the market."

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