

PESTICIDE CEUS AS A PLATFORM FOR WATER RESOURCE EDUCATION

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In Florida, a Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences (FDACS) pesticide license is required for many professionals to apply pesticides, from landscapers to natural areas managers to farmers. After initial licensure, license holders are required to obtain continuing education units (CEUs) to maintain and renew their licenses. Licenses are renewed annually or every four years with requirements ranging from 4-20 CEUs to renew, equating to up to 20 hours of topic-specific instruction. Many of these CEU classes focus directly on pest control strategies and technical topics related to pest identification and pesticide use. Though not usually the primary focus, water quality and quantity are themes found in many pesticide CEU classes from mixing pesticide solutions to keeping contaminants out of waterbodies. As of October 2021, there is estimated to be over 69,500 active FDACS pesticide licenses holders across the state. This presents the opportunity to educate a large audience looking to meet their training requirements by attending interesting classes on diverse topics related to pesticides and pest management. From September 2020 to September 2021, UF/IFAS Extension Seminole County offered 26 virtual pesticide CEU classes that included information on water resource topics to reach a total of 719 group learning participants. In a 3-6 month follow up survey, 94.3% (n=35) claimed that the training made them more aware of the importance of keeping pesticides out of waterbodies, 50.5% (n=107) said they adopted the practice of checking the environmental conditions (ie. chances of rain, wind, soil type etc.) prior to applying pesticides, and 48.6% (n=35) said that they now consider aspects of the location (ie. sunlight, water/irrigation requirements, etc.) prior to planting. Overall, pesticide CEU classes offer a platform that can be expanded in the future to educate professionals on water resource topics.

PRESENTER BIO: Dr. Pinkerton is a graduate of the UF Doctor of Plant Medicine program and has extensive interdisciplinary training on plants. In 2020, she joined extension as the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems agent. In many of her programs, she covers water quantity and quality as related to our food systems.