

Manatee



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Duette agriculturalist honored

TAYLOR FROM 1B

with it until it's done," he says.

Now, Taylor's ranch, with 1,000 acres of leased land, supports 400 head of cattle and employs two or three families at times.

For that success, as well as his willingness to consider innovative farming techniques, the Manatee County Agricultural Extension Service Advisory Committee has recognized Taylor as the 1999 Outstanding Agriculturalist for Manatee County.

"He has really come a long ways," Betty Glassburn, an extension service worker, said. "He cleared the land and improved it. He's a good steward of the soil and tries to preserve water."

The extension service, which provides educational programs for farmers, recognized Taylor during a Nov. 16 luncheon sponsored by the Kiwanis Club.

The award surprised him.

"There's a lot of big operators around here and it makes me kind of humble," said Taylor, a farmer's son who grew up 15 miles north in Hillsborough County.

As Taylor changed, so has his job.

As a young man he remembers struggling with a scourge to ranchers called screw fly. The insects lay their eggs in the soft bellies of newborn calves, and the developing larvae consume the animal's insides.

Each calf needed constant care to guard against the flies until an eradication effort in the 1950s and '60s

drove out the insects.

The industry's biggest change, he said, occurred in the 1970s and '80s when a wave of cross breeding and advanced-feeding techniques resulted in fatter, healthier cows.

Taylor's own cows are crosses — Brahman and Angus, and Beefmaster and Angus. In cross-breeding, he said, he produced a large, healthy cow able to withstand Florida's scorching summers.

Five years ago, Taylor brought another innovation to his ranch. He used sludge from the county's waste treatment plant to fertilize pasture. The move, under way elsewhere, met with skepticism locally.

Taylor studied the issue and contacted the Agricultural Extension Service, which backed the idea. The sludge, which is free, works well and has cut his fertilization costs by thousands of dollars, he said.

"We make our living here, and we're not going to put anything out there that's going to damage how we make our living," he said.

After 50 years as a cattleman, Taylor said he can't envision doing anything else, including retiring.

He said he's rejected several offers for his land and has no plans to leave. He'd like to see his two daughters assume a role in maintaining the property when he's gone, he said.

"If we were to ever sell, we would probably buy more land somewhere else," he said. "I've been a country boy for so long, this is all I ever wanted to do."

DUETTE

County honors inventive rancher

Arlin Taylor cross-breeds his cattle and fertilizes pasture with treatment plant sludge.

By Rich Shopes
STAFF WRITER

Arlin Taylor steers his white pickup from the road named for his family and deep into an orange grove. "They're a bit tart," he says, whittling away the greenish skin of a palm-sized fruit.

"Wait until January."

Forty-five years ago, when Taylor returned from the Korean War, no groves existed on his father's 1,500 acres in Duette Manatee County. Now rows of citrus stand beside cattle pasture, manicured, emerald-green sod and lush melon fields.

Once dry and dotted with turkey oaks and spiny palmetto, the terrain now supports a patchwork of irrigation ditches and pipes, ponds and small dams to hold precious rainwater.

"This is a working farm. There's no playing around here," Taylor, 69, says from under a straw hat.

It shows.

He walks with a limp from a bone spur in his right heel, and his thick, weathered hands are deeply etched from decades of hard work.

Back in the 1950s, while Taylor helped other farmers during the day, he worked nights plowing the rough terrain his father purchased years earlier for \$1.75 an acre.

"I'm the kind of person that stays



Taylor

PLEASE SEE TAYLOR ON 2B