

Rooney's Front Porch Farm

8611 47<sup>th</sup> Drive

Live Oak, FL 32060

386-590-9053

Dear Awards Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you how Bob Hochmuth has impacted our farm and our lives.

Farming is a second career for us both. We moved from the city after a 30-year career in business. Our desire was to start a small farm in Suwannee County. The property was purchased; however, we had no agricultural experience. The programs offered at NFREC were monumental in our education and steering us in the direction we needed to go. Bob was instrumental in the education aspect and plugging us into the Small Farms Academy. He is an invaluable resource in connecting producers with Institute of Food and Agricultural Science (IFAS) staff to solve problems in a wide variety of categories. Bob recognizes the benefits of networking and encourages those opportunities with his staff and stakeholders.

Beyond the education at NFREC and Small Farms Academy, Bob has always been willing to give us individual attention when needed. He has answered many phone calls, met with us in his office and made farm visits. Bob goes way beyond what is expected. When we were having difficulty with the pH in our blueberry field, Bob spent an entire day figuring out how to correct it. After that the blueberry bushes began to thrive. This is just one example of many. Bob was instrumental in our journey from going from "city folks" to having a successful U-Pick operation that hosts over 2,000 people a season.

Serving on the NFREC Advisory Committee, we have seen Bob overcome varied challenges. His ability to work with staff is outstanding. He is kind and considerate while keeping his eye on the goal and managing fairly and efficiently, even in difficult situations. Not only with staff but also with funding issues, storms and difficult neighbors. He is gifted with a spirit of diplomacy and uses it in every area of his work.

Bob has always seen the "Center" as a community asset and realized that very few of the community have actually seen it up close and personal. Hence, he developed a Community Day

that invited the community at large to visit the Center. The attendees took trolley tours of the farm, visited the green houses and fruit orchards and had farm equipment demonstrations. It has been a successful event from the first year. It was Bob's brainchild and he saw that it became a reality.

Many events were taking place under the pole barn. Large equipment was stored there and had to be moved for each event. This was quite labor intensive. Bob had a vision to have a permanent pavilion that could host a variety of events, including the County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship (CARES) Celebration which each year hosts around 750 attendees. The funds (\$250,000) were raised from 80 local farmers, businesses and individuals. The pavilion has become a showpiece at the Center and used frequently by a wide variety of groups for meetings, education and community events.

Bob not only works tirelessly for farmers, large and small, he is an accomplished soccer coach. He coached his twin son's teams from age five through high school and is now coaching his grandson's team. We have met several of his former players and they all have the highest regard for Bob. He truly contributed to the development of the players on and off the field.

The past few years, Bob has joined the Men's Ministry Leadership Team at Mt. Olive Baptist Church. This group plans the yearly event for the men of the congregation. Bob provides strong leadership, vision and responsibility for those among the group.

We highly recommend Bob Hochmuth for induction to the National Association of County Agricultural Agents Hall of Fame. He is a well-deserved candidate.

Sincerely,  
Scott and Billie Rooney