

# EXPLORING FOOD SYSTEMS IN SOUTHERN ITALY WITH FLORIDA MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS PRODUCES STATEWIDE IMPACT

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## Situation

An important aspect of supporting Florida's agricultural industry is creating awareness and appreciation of food systems among citizens. Studying food systems internationally provides a unique opportunity to learn new information that Extension agents and Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV's) can share with clientele to support UF/IFAS Extension High-Priority Initiative 1 (cultivate citizen awareness of food systems and sustainability of production systems and alternatives).

## Objective

To provide an international food systems educational opportunity for Florida MGV's, where participants increase their knowledge of agritourism, fruit production, and alternative fruit crop selection for Florida.

## Methods

Explore and study food systems in Southern Italy, including agricultural enterprises in pomegranate, lemon, apple, olive and wine production; botanical gardens and other edible landscapes. Other areas of concentration included sustainability, cultural methods, and integrated pest management.

*"As MGVs we understand food supply, but this experience shows us how much more work goes into it and it is important as MGVs to share this with others for nutrition, food security, biodiversity and biosecurity." – Linda, Marion County MGV*

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*"We have learned from farmers in Italy that they collaborate with China, Iran, Albania, and Israel for propagation and production techniques. Not for political reasons, but because it is the right thing to do." Linda, Orange County MGV*

## Results

### On-site Focus Group Results:

Revealed an increase in knowledge and awareness of sustainable agricultural practices among the 31 participants.

### 2 Month Post-trip Survey Results:

74% (N= 31) responded to survey, revealing an average increase of horticultural knowledge between 68%-88%, depending on the site visit.

### 5 Month Post-trip Survey Results:

100% (N=20) shared information they learned with others (other MGV's, community members, friends, family and extension clientele).

100% shared information about crops, sustainable horticulture practices, agritourism, Mediterranean diet and food preparation, wine, and alternative crop techniques via workshops, videos, extension publications, PowerPoints, consultations, plant clinics, phone desk, and planting crops studied on tour. 50% increased their local food purchasing practices.

## Conclusion

MGV's shared their gained knowledge with Floridians throughout the state. Sharing their global experiences with fellow volunteers and clientele can help disseminate information to bring more awareness of food systems, agritourism, and potential for alternative fruit crop selection in Florida.

*"My generation is aware of global place and our responsibility. I will bring a bubble of excitement, pride, and unity of how we are all in this together to the plant clinic. Every farm we have visited has lived this and shared it with us." – Evelyn, Marion County MGV*

