

# Agricultural innovation unveiled at May Nursery in Havana

**Hannah Carter**

Gadsden County News Service

Last week, groundbreaking agricultural innovation was unveiled at the May Nursery in Havana.

AECOM, the world's trusted infrastructure consulting firm, developed a new technology with the capacity to increase agricultural sustainability across the nation.

Through transforming harmful algae blooms into a sustainable fertilizer, AECOM's innovation will utilize the building block of life to strengthen agriculture: the building block of our society.

Dan Levy, P.G., AECOM's vice president and environment global director, explains that

most individuals don't understand the potential impact of algae.

Due to population growth, nutrient run-off, and global warming, harmful and toxic algae blooms are increasing.

"They're becoming larger, lasting longer, and growing more toxic. We needed a solution," says Levy.

In an attempt to remove harmful algae from water sources, AECOM developed a patent-pending process called "hydronucliation."

Hydronucliation can rapidly remove algae from a water source by adding and releasing pressurized water, causing algae to float to the top, while dense water remains at the bottom.

Through this process, AECOM engineers have developed a closed-looped system to purify water and create sustainable fertilizer.

"By removing algae, we can remove fertilizer nutrients from the water, decarbonize the atmosphere, and return it as a sustainable fertilizer," Levy explains.

The rapid removal of algae from water sources is a "groundbreaking process" and will aid the agricultural industry's journey towards sustainability.

"It felt like creating fire," says Levy.

Although AECOM developed the technology, partnerships with the University of Florida, Havana's May Nursery,

the Northwest Florida Water Management District, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and others allowed for increased impact of the project.

In celebration of AECOM's innovation, the May Nursery hosted an unveiling on Tuesday.

Community members gathered to see the new technology first-hand, and representatives from various institutions and agencies spoke to praise the project.

Daniel Blackman, the Region Four Regional Administrator of the state's Environmental Protection Agency, attended Tuesday's events and expressed his excitement and support for the project.

"Algae harvesting is a wonderful opportunity to clean our water systems. We have to remember that the foundation of our country is agriculture and farming. The better we're able to reuse, repurpose, and restore, the better everyone is," says Blackman. "Our goal is to support technology that removes algae and restores our waterways. We're proud to be here and proud to support projects that align with the EPA's mission."

Blackman emphasized the local impact of AECOM's project.

"This is happening in Florida, and it's connecting counties and cities across the state," he states.

For Floridians looking

to contribute to agricultural sustainability, Blackman encourages individuals to get involved by investing in local agriculture, like the May Nursery, and seeking education about sustainability efforts, many of which can be found at epa.gov

According to Levy, AECOM's technology will be the "anchor point in how the rest of the country will move forward."

Following Tuesday's event, AECOM will continue to develop their technology and work to increase its accessibility across the nation, in hopes that AECOM will become "the ideal stewards of how all agriculture will be done in the future."

FROM "READING SCORES" ON PAGE 1

"We've had ongoing teacher shortages in Gadsden County in years past. It's been very difficult to get high-quality teachers into Gadsden County," said Key.

Key adds that it is teachers - more so than principals and administrators - who make a difference in the educational gains of a county.

"You can get a good administrator, but it is the teachers who are face-to-face with the kids everyday," Key adds. "Not having those great teachers with our kids every day has been

one of the major problems in Gadsden."

Key notes that while Gadsden County has been able to offer pay raises and better salaries to teachers, aimed at changing the dynamic of competition that Gadsden has with neighboring Leon County (which has historically been able to offer higher wages to teachers), the battle is 'not yet won'.

"We have not won that battle," said Key. "Getting our educators to stay in Gadsden County - or getting back our teachers [who have left] will make a difference."

The other factor at play in the low reading scores, Key notes though, takes place at home.

"What's going on in the home, and how can we negate what has happened in the home once the kids get to us?" said Key, saying that parents need to get involved in their child's education.

Key also expressed a need for students to have experienced at-home conversations on academic vocabulary with their parents.

According to Key, 'academic vocabulary' are conversations that focus on an understanding of proper English language, paired with parent-child discussions that focus on education, development, and understanding of learning materials.

"Our kids don't come prepared [with academic vocabulary]," said Key. "These are not the conversations they are having day-to-day at home. We've got to change those dynamics."

Key, who is also a parent with children in Gadsden County schools, says he has to prioritize holding academic-themed conversations at home in order to inspire that "academic vocabulary" within his own family.

It means correcting his children when they are using incorrect vocabulary, holding conversations that foster an interest in education, and encouraging his children to correct him when his own vocabulary slips up.

"It helps [my kids] when they go to take tests," said Key.

But Key does acknowledge that not all parents may be equipped to hold those conversations.

"The drop-out rate in the past [for Gadsden County] has been high," said Key.

Due to years of high school students not making it to graduation, some of those prior students are now parents with their own children in the school system - and Key says the district needs to reach out to those parents and better equip them.

Key says he would be open to seeing more educational opportunities

for parents, and to help parents foster a spirit of learning at home.

In the past (while a principal of a school), Key says he has hosted educational parent's nights, which were well-received by parents.

The nights allowed parents to look through the materials that their children would be learning in the upcoming weeks, and the school's educators would be ready to help equip parents to guide their children through those materials at home.

"It works. It helps them go back home and they can talk to their kids about what they are learning. It gives them ways to help their child," said Key. "Sometimes parents don't help their child because they can't help their child."

With Gadsden County's 2021-2022 3rd grade reading score, Key says the data looks as though roughly 73% of the county's students are not ready for grade 4.

But a low score is not a final toll on a student's education.

While students who make a low score may be more at-risk for dropping out in the long run, Key says the district is putting together long term plans to make sure that no 3rd grader drops behind.

"We are making sure that we do interventions with those kids to make sure that doesn't happen," says Key.

Those interventions look like reading camps, seeking out teachers, and educating parents.

This assessment, Key says, will not be a 'drop-out prescription' for Gadsden County's kids.

Key says the district is aware of what their departing 3rd grade class needs to succeed - and Key brings up the Class of 2022 as an example.

This year, the district had a large graduation class - a vast improvement compared to previous years' graduating classes.

"We didn't start the year out with high school students who were graduation ready," said Key. "But we ended the year with 86% of the students being graduation ready. That takes hard work and dedication from everyone - students and educators."

By the time the students get to middle school, Key says the district wants students to be ready to leave elementary school, even if they tested low on the reading score.

"We will never count any kids out. We are here to change the tides," said Key. "This shows how much more room we have to grow, and what direction we need to take when it comes to early learning and building a solid foundation for our early learners."

SEE "READING SCORES" ON PAGE 13

City of Gretna, Florida  
Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Funding

**PUBLIC NOTICE OF  
CITIZEN ADVISORY TASK FORCE (CATF) MEETING,  
FAIR HOUSING WORKSHOP &  
FIRST PUBLIC HEARING**

The City of Gretna is considering applying to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity for a FFY 2021 and FFY 2022 Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). Up to \$24.8 million in FFY 2021 funding and approximately \$23 million in FFY 2022 funding will be available to eligible applicants in the neighborhood revitalization, commercial revitalization, housing rehabilitation and economic development program areas. Gretna is eligible to apply for up to \$1.5 million in the economic development category and up to \$700,000 in the other three program areas noted.

CDBG funds may be used for the following types of activities: constructing storm-water ponds, paving roads and sidewalks, installing sewer and water lines, building a community center or park, making improvements to a sewage treatment plant, and rehabilitating low-income homes. In developing a CDBG application, Gretna must minimize displacement of persons because of any proposed CDBG funded activities and is required to develop a plan to assist any displaced persons.

Construction activities funded through the CDBG Program must meet one of the following National Objectives:

- Provide benefit to low- and moderate-income persons;
- Prevent or eliminate slum or blight conditions; or
- Meet a need of recent origin having a particular urgency.

Additional information regarding the range of activities that could be funded will be provided at the public hearing.

**CATF Meeting:** A CATF meeting will be held on **June 28, 2022, at 5:30 p.m.** to discuss community needs and make project recommendations.

**Fair Housing Workshop:** A workshop on local, state, and federal fair housing laws will be held on **June 28, 2022, at 6:30 p.m.**

**Public Hearing:** A special public hearing to obtain citizen comment concerning the City's economic and community development needs will be held, directly following the fair housing workshop, on **June 28, 2022, at 6:30 p.m.**

The CATF meeting, Fair Housing Workshop and Public Hearing will be conducted in a handicapped accessible location at **Gretna City Hall, 14615 Main St, Gretna, FL 32332**. Pursuant to the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act, any person requiring special accommodations to participate in the workshop and hearing is asked to advise the City at least five days before the hearing. For more information, or to request special accommodations, please contact **Antonio Jefferson, City Manager at 850-856-5257 or [ajeffer@mygretna.com](mailto:ajeffer@mygretna.com)**. If you are hearing or speech impaired, please contact the City of Gretna using the Florida Relay Service, 1(800) 955-8771 (TTY) or 1(800) 955-8770 (Voice).

Any non-English speaking person wishing to receive information on this public notice can contact **Antonio Jefferson, City Manager at 850-856-5257 or [ajeffer@mygretna.com](mailto:ajeffer@mygretna.com)** and interpretation will be provided. For Spanish interpretation services, please use the services provided through Florida Relay by first calling 844-463-9710.

Cualquier persona que no hable inglés y que desee recibir información que no sea este aviso público puede comunicarse con Antonio Jefferson, administrador de la ciudad al 850-856-5257 o [ajeffer@mygretna.com](mailto:ajeffer@mygretna.com) y se proporcionará interpretación. Para los servicios de interpretación de español a inglés, utilice los servicios proporcionados a través de Florida Relay llamando primero al 844-463-9710.

**AUGUST 23, 2022**

**VOTE**

**ALONZETTA SIMPKINS**

**FOR DISTRICT 2**  
County Commissioner

- COMMITTED
- RESOURCEFUL
- INFORMATIVE

**MY WHY**

- INCREASE ECONOMIC GROWTH
- OPENNESS & TRANSPARENCY
- INCREASE HEALTH EQUITY
- INVEST IN AT RISK YOUTH

**AVAILABLE TO SERVE**

Paid by Alonzetta Simpkins; Democrat, for County Commissioner