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STATE LEGISLATORS FLORES AND McKEEL RECEIVE FFVA HONORS

MAITLAND, Fla. (Sept. 20, 2011) – The Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association presented its Legislator of the Year awards today to Florida Sen. Anitere Flores (R-Miami), head of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Rep. Seth McKeel (R-Lakeland), chair of the House State Affairs Committee.

McKeel led the charge to override Gov. Charlie Crist's veto of the 2010 ag industry bill, which exempted agriculture from many duplicative local regulations and fees. The agriculture industry worked for three legislative sessions to get the bill passed, only to have Crist veto it.

"As part of the House leadership team, Rep. McKeel has worked hard to ensure that agriculture remains a viable industry in Florida," said Butch Calhoun, FFVA's director of government relations. "He understands our industry and has always been there to help."

The "Healthy Schools for Healthy Lives" bill passed by the Legislature this year and signed into law was a committee bill sponsored by McKeel's committee. The bill, also sponsored by Sen. Gary Siplin (D-Orlando), moved the school food and nutrition programs from the Department of Education to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Flores sponsored the original version of SB 2040, one of the first immigration bills proposed in the Florida Senate this past session. As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, she held numerous workshops on immigration. She understands the impact a bad bill could have on the agricultural industry, Calhoun said, and worked to minimize any harmful effects to agriculture before sponsorship of the legislation was reassigned by the Senate president.

"As a freshman senator and as a former House member, she has worked long and hard for agriculture during her tenure in the legislature, especially during the 2011 legislative session," said Calhoun. "Sen. Flores doesn't have an ag background, but she really understands our issues and is always ready and willing to work with us."

The awards were announced at FFVA's 68th Annual Convention at the Ritz-Carlton in Palm Beach.

Past recipients of the Legislator of the Year Award include Sens. Durell Peaden Jr., Charlie Dean, Cary Baker, Mike Bennett, Jeff Atwater, Nancy Argenziano and Bill Posey; and Reps. Steve Crisafulli, Trudi Williams, Denise Grimsley, Baxter Troutman, Dean Cannon, Dudley J. Goodlette and Marty Bowen.

Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association represents Florida's producers of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops.

Digital photos are available by e-mailing barbara.wunder@ffva.com.