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EXPERT IN POST-HARVEST RESEARCH HONORED AS FFVA'S RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR

MAITLAND, Fla. (Sept. 21, 2010) – The Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association presented its Researcher of the Year Award to Dr. Steven Sargent, professor of postharvest physiology and technology at the University of Florida.

In his nomination, Dr. Daniel Cantliffe, professor emeritus and chair of UF's Horticultural Sciences Department, said Sargent's applied research "has helped our growers, packers and shippers to compete more effectively in the marketplace, particularly through his work with implementation of food safety programs, with reducing mechanical damage during harvest and handling, and with effective cooling strategies for a wide variety of horticultural crops."

During his 23 years with the university's horticultural sciences department, Sargent has focused on solving practical issues that face fruit and vegetable growers around the state, with a goal of filling in knowledge gaps. He has developed numerous collaborative projects with other researchers in several disciplines, including agricultural engineering, fruit and vegetable production and breeding, plant pathology, food science and agricultural economics.

Blueberry grower Alto Straughn, owner of Straughn Farms in Waldo, cited two projects conducted on his farm involving packing quality and shelf life of mechanically harvested blueberries. "His contribution to this knowledge base will help us deal with the looming labor problem for harvesting fresh blueberries," Straughn said. "It's this excellent, quality on-farm applied research that will allow blueberry growers in Florida to ensure that the crop will get harvested and thus provide large economic benefits."

The presentation took place during FFVA's Annual Convention at The Ritz-Carlton in Naples. Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association is an agricultural trade organization representing Florida's producers of fruits, vegetables and other crops.

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