

2004  
**Woman of the Year**  
*in Agriculture*



*Martina "Teena" Borek*

## Dear Friends of Agriculture:

The Woman of the Year in Agriculture award ceremony is always a much-anticipated event, adding to the excitement of opening-day festivities at the Florida State Fair. Since 1985 the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has proudly sponsored this prestigious award in conjunction with the Florida State Fair Authority.

It is my pleasure to present the Woman of the Year in Agriculture award for 2004 to Teena Borek of Homestead.

Teena Borek exemplifies all the excellent qualities we tend to associate with the small family farmer – hard work, perseverance, strength, resolve, and quiet dignity. Against the odds, in the face of falling prices, bad weather, and changing markets, she has managed to keep her 500-acre vegetable farm strong and viable. It has taken ingenuity to do that – and determination, and a top-notch product. Her sweet corn, green beans, heirloom tomatoes, and miniature vegetables have gained a reputation for superior flavor and quality. Teena herself has become known as a fearless innovator and one of the state's most promising leaders in agriculture and natural resources. She is recognized for her tireless efforts to promote Florida agriculture, protect farm workers, and mentor women in the industry. Teena served as president of the Dade County Farm Bureau and is a pillar of support for Farm Share, the Redlands Christian Migrant Association, and the Everglades Community Association. A devoted mother, she has passed on her love of the land to her two grown sons, who are becoming accomplished farmers in their own right.

As the most recent inductee into this exclusive group, Teena Borek joins 20 other women who have earned the respect and admiration of their peers by making outstanding contributions to Florida agriculture.

Again, it is my great pleasure and honor to congratulate Teena Borek for being named Woman of the Year in Agriculture for 2004.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Charles H. Bronson'.

Charles H. Bronson  
Commissioner of Agriculture



## **Martina “Teena” Borek**

Teena Borek is an agricultural hero. In the face of tragedy and difficulty she has consistently displayed an inspiring resiliency, strength, and courage. Over the last 25 years she has overcome numerous adversities, transforming herself from a stay-at-home mom into a successful farm manager and a respected leader in the agricultural community. She has pioneered new farming technologies, discovered and developed promising niche markets, worked tirelessly to promote Florida agriculture, and given generously of herself in service to her community.

Teena grew up in a small town in Newfoundland, visiting her aunt's farm in southern Dade County during summer vacations. It was during one of these trips that she met Steven Borek, a gifted young farmer from an old and well-respected Homestead farming family. Farming was in Steven's blood. The two married and started a family; at the same time, they started their own farm, Steven Borek Farms, Inc.

While Steven ran the farm, growing potatoes, beans, tomatoes, and seed corn, Teena kept the books and cared for the couple's two young sons. Then tragedy struck. In 1980, at the age of 24, Steven was killed when his pickup truck plunged into a canal on the Borek property. Teena was left with two toddlers to raise and a 500-acre farm to run.





Teena Borek was trained as an accountant, not as a farmer. But what she lacked in farming skills, she made up for in determination. She began an intensive program of self-education, attending every agricultural workshop and class she could find and asking lots of questions. She sought help and advice at the Dade County Agricultural Center and from her local County Extension agents. Steven's family also offered assistance. Teena made it through her first season – and she did not lose the farm.

Time proved Teena to be an excellent – and innovative – farm manager. She was constantly learning, constantly experimenting, never afraid to take a chance on promising new products or



technologies. Teena was the first farmer in Dade County to use a linear irrigation system and one of the first vegetable farmers in Homestead to use a computer in her work. For years she partnered with University of Florida researchers to experiment with higher-yielding varieties and more nutritious crops; in fact, it was at Steven Borek Farms that the Florida 7862 tomato was first commercially grown.

Teena managed to juggle the demands of motherhood with the demands of the farm. It wasn't easy; she wore many hats and often found herself working 24 hours a day. Her dedication and strong work ethic inspired a fierce loyalty in her employees and won her the respect of her fellow growers. Yet the hardships and setbacks kept coming. Teena brought the farm through several devastating freezes; then Hurricane Andrew struck, and like most growers in the Homestead area, she lost nearly everything. She wasted no time feeling sorry for herself. She rebuilt the farm, planting 60 acres of seed corn just days after the storm blew out all the windows in her house and destroyed most of her farming equipment.

Teena's farm survived and thrived because she was willing to adapt to changing circumstances. Fickle weather wouldn't throw her for a loop, and neither would changing markets. While many other Dade County farmers have quit in the face of plummeting prices and increasing production costs, Borek Farms has successfully adapted to current market trends by changing both its size and its crop types. Throughout the 1980s the farm grew approximately 1,000 acres of seed corn. In the 1990s it shifted to sweet corn, tomatoes, beans, and specialty crops. Today, the farm has shrunk to just over 400 acres; sweet corn and green beans are the primary crops, while small acreages are reserved for heirloom tomatoes and miniature vegetables, including baby squash, baby eggplant, and baby beans.

Tender, tasty, and beautiful to look at, Teena's miniature vegetables are becoming increasingly popular. Recognized for their exceptional quality, they are in high demand by fine restaurants and gourmet markets throughout the United States and Canada. Chefs from Miami's five-star restaurants routinely visit the farm to pick Teena's baby vegetables fresh from the fields.



Chefs and foodies choose Teena's vegetables because they know them to be the best. But a top-quality product is no longer enough to guarantee success; these days, Teena realizes, a savvy marketing plan is essential for connecting farm products with consumers. As director of the Dade Agri-Council, Teena spearheaded a grower-led effort to produce a video promoting Dade County agriculture. She is a charter member and staunch supporter of the Florida Agricultural Promotion Campaign, which helps consumers easily identify Florida-grown products. She is also an outspoken supporter of mandatory country-of-origin labeling for fruits and vegetables, convinced that the best way to protect Florida agriculture is by empowering the consumer to make an informed buying decision.

After 25 years on the farm, Teena is eager to share her experience and hard-earned knowledge with her neighbors and other growers. A member of the board of the Dade County Farm Bureau since 1985, she is now serving as the group's second female president. She also serves on the boards of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, the Florida Tomato Growers Exchange, Community Bank of Florida, the Florida Heartland Heritage Foundation and Dade County Agricultural Practices Board. She is a member of the Florida Farm Bureau Labor Advisory Committee and the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association Labor Committee. Teena is a recent graduate of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources, which teaches farmers how to network and pull together to make the industry better for everyone.

Teena has always credited her success to the help and guidance she has received from her employees, neighboring farmers, and her

family. For this reason, it is extremely important to her to give back to her community and mentor young people interested in agricultural careers. Through her farm's internship program, she has mentored dozens of young people in agriculture, hosting students from as far away as Poland and South Africa. She was involved with the South Dade High School Agricultural Advisory Council and Dade County Women in Agriculture. She currently is involved with the Florida Agri-Women and received that group's first Founder's Award. In addition, she is on the board of the Everglades Community Association, a non-profit that provides state-of-the-art housing to farm workers. She donates produce and equipment to Farm Share, which works to alleviate hunger by recovering fresh food for distribution to the needy. At the 2003 Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association Benefit Auction, Teena helped raise over \$76,000 for the Redlands Christian Migrant Association, an organization that creates and fosters opportunities for the children of migrant and other low-income rural families.

But her fondest work has been raising her two sons, Steven Jr. and Michael, teaching them to love the land just as their father loved it. When asked why she fought so hard to save the family farm, Teena has often explained that she did it so her boys would have a future. Now the boys are young men and have joined their mother in her work. They will keep the Borek family farming tradition going strong.





## Previous Winners

- 2003** Jennie Lee Zipperer of Fort Myers
- 2002** Annette Barnett Land of Branford
- 2001** Barbara Carlton of Sidell
- 2000** Helen Houck of Perry
- 1999** Vina Jean Banks of Balm
- 1998** Nancy Gurnett Hardy of Winter Haven
- 1997** Gertrude "Trudy" Carey of Hillsborough County
- 1996** Norma Stokes of Highlands County
- 1995** Louve "Vee" Frierson Platt of Clewiston,  
and Patricia Robbins of Miami
- 1994** Anne Wardlaw Dickinson of Frostproof
- 1993** Sarah W. Bailey of St. Johns County
- 1992** Carol C. Murphy of Volusia County
- 1991** Ruth M. Tucker of Brevard County
- 1990** Jeanette Barthle of Pasco County
- 1989** Belle Jeffords of Alachua County
- 1988** Carolyn Reed Kempfer of Osceola County
- 1987** Dorothy Conner Shipes of Lake County
- 1986** Ruth Wedgworth of Belle Glade
- 1985** Jo Ann Smith of Marion County



**Florida Department of Agriculture  
and Consumer Services**

**CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner**