

**2005**  
**Woman of the Year**  
*in Agriculture*



*Marlene Strickland*



## 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 2005

to Marlene Strickland of Sarasota.

Marlene Strickland has made it her life's work to help preserve Florida's agricultural tradition and to pass on the important skills she learned growing up in a farm family. As a 4-H volunteer leader for the past 30 years, Marlene has helped a new generation gain hands-on farming and ranching experience. With more and more Floridians becoming removed from their rural roots, she and other 4-H volunteers provide young people with an invaluable opportunity to reconnect with the land.

Friends and admirers say Marlene has found success in 4-H because of her kindness, enthusiasm, strong work ethic, and ability to empathize with other people. These same qualities have made her a leader in her industry as well. Marlene raises cattle as her parents did before her, and in 2004 she was elected to serve as president of the nation's largest beef industry organization for women, American National CattleWomen, Inc. She made it the focus of her presidency to get to know as many members as she could on an individual basis, listening and sharing her own experience. In the process, she increased the visibility of Florida's beef industry and became one of Florida agriculture's most effective ambassadors.

Now, Marlene joins 21 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 Marlene Strickland for being named Woman of the Year in Agriculture for 2005.



Sincerely,

Charles H. Bronson  
Commissioner of Agriculture



## Marlene Strickland

Marlene Strickland was born in Sarasota in 1945 into a pioneer Florida farming family. The pioneer spirit is part of Strickland's makeup; she's tough and enterprising. She grew up working hard, helping out on her family's commercial cow-calf ranch in eastern Sarasota County. The family raised purebred Brahms and crossbreed cattle. After graduating from Fort Myers High School, she married Don Strickland and together they started an electrical contracting business, Land Electric, Inc., and began raising Angus cattle in their spare time. Along the way, Marlene Strickland also gave birth to two daughters.





When their daughters got old enough, the Stricklands signed them up for 4-H—and came on board themselves as volunteer leaders, heading up a club they named the Ridin’ Rednecks. Eventually the girls moved on and went off to college, but the elder Stricklands stayed with 4-H. The couple thrived in the organization; they were natural leaders and teachers. In 1989



Marlene Strickland received 4-H's Volunteer of the Year Award and represented Florida at the National 4-H Conference in Washington, D.C. Over the years she and Don built a program so popular that there is now a waiting list to join.

In 2002 4-H turned 100 years old. Tradition is important in this venerable club, but leaders like Marlene Strickland know how to keep activities fun, exciting, and relevant to today's young people. The Ridin' Rednecks' recent projects have included collecting food and furniture for hurricane victims and setting up a pet-friendly shelter for families displaced by the storms. Strickland has worked with 4-H youth to clean up and enhance local parks, and she set up a workshop for kids to learn about native plants, beach erosion, and beach conservation. She received considerable media attention when her club helped Sarasota's Reef Ball Development Group sink 400-pound concrete balls into Sarasota Bay to create reef habitat for marine life.

Strickland says she believes in 4-H because it provides entertainment and education, and because it allows families to focus on a common, worthwhile goal and see progress. Today, Strickland is one of the most recognized and successful leaders in Florida 4-H, and she continues to pour a tremendous amount of time and creativity into the program.

But Strickland has always had too much energy and too many ideas to confine herself to just one organization. Running the Ridin' Rednecks has prepared her well for the many other leadership roles she has taken on in her community and her industry.



In 1985 Strickland became a member of the Sarasota County CattleWomen's Association and the Florida CattleWomen's Association. She served in every leadership position available at the local level. At the state level, she served as recording secretary, Florida Cook-Off chairperson, beef promotion chairperson, membership chairperson, president-elect, and, finally, president. In 2000 the Florida CattleWomen named her CattleWoman of the Year.

Strickland became involved with the CattleWomen at the national level, too. In 2005 she was elected president of American National CattleWomen, Inc. (ANCW). The mission of ANCW is to support women in the cattle industry and educate consumers about the nutritiousness of beef. The organization sponsors two very well-known projects: the National Beef Cook-off recipe contest and the National Beef Ambassador Program, a public speaking competition for high school students. As president, Strickland made it her goal to learn as much as she could about the organization's 2,000 members. The year of her presidency—2005—was a transitional one in which the organization took a look at how it could better help women keep pace with the industry. Strickland traveled around the country, getting to know cattlemen in every state and sharing information about Florida agriculture. She met with congressmen and senators and worked to build up ANCW's membership one woman at a time.

During her 50 years in agriculture, Strickland has won admirers in every sector of the industry. Those who know her attribute her success to her keen intelligence, strong work ethic, kindness, and

sensitivity to the needs of others. A close friend, Dr. Tim Marshall, a professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, describes her as having "the heart of a mother, the work ethic of an ancient Roman soldier, and the ability to reach all people with the message of agriculture."

Marlene Strickland lives in Sarasota and enjoys spending time with her husband, daughters, and four grandchildren. Every year she reads to local kindergarten classes on Ag Literacy Day and conducts livestock tours at the Sarasota County Fair.





## Previous Winners

- 2004** Martina "Teena" Borek of Homestead  
**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**