

Profile: Dr. Norm Leppla

Norm Leppla, professor and IPM coordinator at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, has worked in Entomology and IPM since receiving his Ph.D. in Entomology/Biological Sciences in 1972. An avid outdoorsman with a love for natural history, Leppla's career path was influenced early on by the founding members of the EPA.

"When I was studying to receive my bachelor's degree in zoology at Arizona State University, some of the founding members of the EPA visited the campus and talked to people about how they were going to protect our environment. I heard them talking about it and said to myself, that's what I want to do," said Leppla.

As a professor and IPM coordinator, Leppla works with faculty members and individuals from other institutions to develop programs to advance the use of IPM. Together they work to improve research, extension, and education projects, and generate the funds and resources necessary to help make these programs successful.

"We don't just need funds to make an IPM program successful, we need high caliber people to actually conduct the work," said Leppla. "Fortunately for us that is exactly what the University produces, high caliber students and graduates. This is in addition to our excellent faculty and cooperators."

Leppla has a long history of involvement in research projects, including assisting in the development of the commercial production of a pest mole cricket nematode. A success, the program now has a commercial product that is used to control pest mole crickets. The program has prompted additional work to distribute two or three insects that are natural enemies to the mole crickets across the southeastern U. S. and Puerto Rico.

Not only has Leppla been involved in field research, he has given back to the University's education system by assisting in the development of the Doctor of Plant Medicine program. "We are very, very pleased and excited about the program and its future," said Leppla. "The program gives graduates unlimited opportunities because they have very broad training, opening many doors for them."

Currently, Leppla works across Florida and the Caribbean to safeguard the U.S. against non-indigenous, invasive species. By implementing IPM processes, particularly advanced surveillance and detection systems, Leppla and his team work together to increase the United State's capacity of detecting and excluding pests that threaten our borders.

An avid member and head of numerous organizations and committees, Leppla is proud of the opportunities he's had working with a wide range of organizations. Currently, he is vice-chairman of the SRIPMC Advisory Council, co-chairman of the International Organization for Biological Control Arthropod Mass Rearing and Quality Control Working Group and he is advisor to the Association of Natural Bio-control Producers, just to name a few. Leppla also advises up to 15 graduate students a year, with 12 planned for the upcoming semester. "These graduate students, they really are the future of IPM, so I try to spend a lot of time with them," said Leppla.

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Leppla, an avid sailor, is "Steering the course of IPM in Florida."

"IPM is critically important because it offers sustainable long-term management, rather than the single tactic of repeated chemical pesticide application. "

- Dr. Norm Leppla