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### **Costa Kids Learn Science at Custom Camp**

“Sometimes things fit together so well you wonder why you didn’t think to try them earlier,” says Dustin Angell, Archbold Biological Station’s Education Coordinator. He is referring to Archbold’s ongoing collaboration with Costa Farms (formerly Delray Plants), to offer a science camp for their employees’ children. “This was our third summer running this custom program. It is our last week of camp, and I look forward to running it all season.”

Partnering with Costa Farms helps Archbold expand its outreach and connect with underserved families. Although Archbold’s long-running 3-5th grade program serves all the public schools in Highlands County, historically its summer ecology camps did not attract many Hispanic or Latino children. In a county where one-third of the students are Hispanic or Latino, Archbold searched for ways to identify and remove the barriers that kept these children away.

Costa Farms is Highlands County’s fifth largest employer and Archbold’s neighbor. The initial idea for the non-profit-private company collaboration came from Dr. Hilary Swain, Archbold’s Executive Director. She was watching their employees’ cars pass by Archbold one evening and remembered thinking, “We just have the perfect opportunity right at our doorstep. Maybe this is the chance for us to connect with these employees and provide a special camp for their children.”

Costa Farms, then Delray Plants, was quick to accept the offer of a partnership and help Archbold overcome their challenges. Randy Gilde, the former owner, remembers Hilary reaching out, “Hilary called and said she had an opportunity. And there was no question that

we were interested. It was going to be difficult for Archbold's regular 9am-3pm camp. Right away they created a 7:30am-4:30pm camp so that the employees could drop the kids off on the way to work and pick them up on the way home.”

After the initial phone call, Archbold’s Angell worked with the company's staff to craft a custom camp program that met the needs of the workforce. These changes included: shifting from five-day to two-day camps with extended hours for easier pickup; providing breakfast, lunch, and healthy snacks; keeping families and 7-12 year olds together instead of separating them into different sessions; eliminating the night program due to transportation issues; providing a Spanish translator during camp pickup; and adding a family pizza party. This year, as before, the Costa staff translated all the application materials and recruited the campers. Thanks to a generous gift from former Archbold Board members Robert and Donna Lloyd George, as well as a contribution from Costa Farms, Archbold offered the program at no cost to the families.

Bert Martinez, Costa’s General Manager is happy with the summer camp. “The camp that Hilary and her staff puts on for our ‘Costa Kids’ is second to none and provides us the opportunity to give back to our most treasured resource, our people. This is our third year collaborating with Archbold on this camp and we look forward to the partnership for years to come.”

Angell credits the success of the camp to the parents. “What really makes this camp work is the trust of the parents. We put the campers in situations that their parents may be uncomfortable with themselves, like hiking in the woods, holding a live snake, wading through waist-high water in a dark pond, or swimming in a sinkhole lake. I am so grateful to these brave parents who trust us with sharing our love of nature with their children.”

Learn more about Archbold’s Costa Farms camp here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GQwJL9m47M>.

**Photo 1: Archbold campers from Costa Farms hold a live pine snake. Photo by Dustin Angell.**



**Photo 2: Angell with the Costa Farms campers. Photo by Dustin Angell.**

