

HIGHLANDS TODAY

A MEDIA GENERAL NEWSPAPER

THE DAILY VOICE OF FLORIDA'S HEARTLAND SERVING HARDEE AND HIGHLANDS COUNTIES



STEPHEN M. DOWELL/Highlands Today

It's warm in the pits

Race-car-driver Jeff Glenn stays cool under the shade of an umbrella as he waits in the pit area during a practice run Friday at Sebring International Raceway. The SCCA national races are being held this weekend at the raceway.

Bumper citrus crops in new year

By KEVIN KALEY
Highlands Today

SEBRING — After squeaking through some lean and uncertain years, the citrus and cattle industries in Highlands County are looking forward to a happy new year.

The United States Department of Agriculture predicts this citrus season, which roughly runs from November through May, will produce a bumper crop. In fact, it could prove the largest Florida crop ever if it reaches the 220 million boxes predicted, said Dan Foley of the Highlands County Citrus Growers Association. The record stands at 207 million boxes produced during the 1979-80 season and the predicted number of boxes represents a 6 percent increase over that, he said.

The cattle industry, an important economic entity in the region, experienced deflated prices last year due to a glut of cattle produced and shipped to the United States from Mexico, said Red Bohanon of the Highlands County Cattlemen's Association. But last year's bad news could mean this year's good fortune.

"We are looking for better prices this year," he said. "We think Mexico is about dried up. They don't have much more cattle to send here and that should make it better for the U.S. cattle industry."

He added that higher prices charged by cattlemen shouldn't necessarily mean higher prices for consumers. He said a calf is sold now for about 62 cents per pound, while the average is 30 to 40 cents a pound. But in the stores, beef sells for \$5 to \$6 per pound for a good steak.

"Someone is making a good cut there somewhere," he said.

Past problems are also behind the sunnier outlook for Highlands' citrus producers. After the big freeze of 1989 when growers lost trees, many moved farther south around Highlands to start new groves, Foley said.

Today, those new trees are bearing fruit in a warmer climate, he said.

The freeze impacted last year's crop also and the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], which allows Mexico less stringent rules regarding access to American markets, also looms over the citrus in-