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CF announces partnership for forestry program in Levy County

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CHIEFLAND -- The College of Central Florida plans to offer a noncredit forestry program in Levy County beginning in the fall of 2016, thanks to partners invested in the timber industry and education.

Lyme Timber Co., a private timberland organization, has pledged \$200,000 for program startup, with any remaining funds to be used for tuition. Lyme worked with AMCREF Community Capital Fund to secure the funding.

The program will consist of a noncredit heavy equipment operators course for the timber industry and a 2 + 2 articulation agreement in forestry with the University of Florida. Dr. Michael Andreu from UF will serve on the industry advisory committee.

According to the Florida Forest Service, Florida's nearly 17.5 million acres of timberlands supported economic activities that generated \$16.3 billion in total impacts in 2015. The program will address the shortage of skilled workers who operate heavy equipment used in harvesting timber.

Lynetta Griner of Usher Land and Timber approached the college about the possibility of offering a forestry program at CF after hearing about a similar program in Louisiana.

"We are seeing a shortage of qualified employees in our area," Griner said. "I would love to see the College of Central Florida explore this idea."

The program will support an education pathway for the timber industry in Florida. Existing programs in Levy County schools include a Career and Technical Academy for grades nine through 12 and active high school chapters of Future Farmers of America. CF offers a Bachelor of Applied Science in Business and Organizational Management with an Agribusiness specialization. And University of Florida has a Bachelor of Science in Forest Resources and Conservation.

Students who complete the CF noncredit program would be also eligible for Agricultural Education Services and Technology certification and Master Logger Certification.

"This program is a perfect fit for our community," said, Marilyn Ladner, provost of the CF Levy Center. "The program will help prepare students for a lucrative career that allows them to work outdoors and be at home every night.

"This collaboration demonstrates how committed partners are working together to meet the needs of our community," Ladner continued. "In all my years of program development, I have never had a project with as much momentum as this one.