

Knowledge Exchange with Brazil Important in Fight Against HLB

By Harold Browning



Before the onset of HLB in the Western Hemisphere, collaboration between the Brazil and Florida citrus industries was rare. Of course, mutual crises can make fast partners of even the fiercest competitors.

Now, the symbiotic relationship between Florida and Brazil is very apparent. We need each other as we battle this insidious disease in groves and the laboratory. Through research exchanges, international conferences and cooperation in the laboratory, scientists from both countries are making headway on HLB management with a goal of ultimately beating HLB.

I witnessed the challenges Brazilian growers face during a recent information-gathering trip to Brazil. I travelled the citrus regions of the São Paulo and Paraná states, visiting large and small citrus operations and observing their efforts to manage the disease.

I saw a lot of parallels to the successes and frustrations of Florida citrus growers and their counterparts in Brazil. Fundecitrus, the Brazilian citrus research agency, served as the primary host of the trip that included grove, laboratory and greenhouse visits.

Fundecitrus is a grower-supported organization that, in addition to establishing priorities and communicating research results, directly supports the research effort through staff and facilities that are dedicated to finding and demonstrating solutions. Their translational research has helped the director, Juliano Ayres, and his group work directly with growers in responding to the needs of the industry.

With Ayres and his scientists, I was able to see several field experiments, such as large-scale nutrition programs, psyllid management approaches and tree removal and replanting strategies. I also saw growers who took the initiative to manage neighboring groves to reduce their HLB pressure.

At one point, I gave a presentation to a group of about 75 citrus growers on the status of HLB in Florida and the management tools which are being delivered. The audience was quite interested in the health maintenance tools that Florida is pursuing, since their primary efforts are on maintaining low levels of psyllids and removing and replacing infected trees.

The visit included discussion on cooperative possibilities between the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) and Fundecitrus. Shared field trials, increased collaborations between scientists working on common themes, and other opportunities were identified.

Much like Florida, Brazilian growers have experienced a lot of success working together to control psyllid populations. In addition, they are still aggressively removing infected trees in an attempt to keep inoculum levels low. It seems to be working. Fundecitrus recently announced results of a new São Paulo HLB survey that determined an 18 percent infection rate in the state. Anecdotally, we observed very low incidence (none visible) to high infection rates in the field.

Many growers in Brazil have implemented intensive border management through psyllid control and removal/replanting.

Clearly, the hurdles faced by Brazilian growers are shared by their colleagues in Florida. We have and will continue to learn a lot from each other's experiences. Both Brazil and Florida have some extremely accomplished scientists and producers, and we would be remiss not to tap into the collective knowledge. As HLB threatens the global citrus industry, we have progressed beyond an "us" and "them" mentality. The CRDF is committed to foster collaboration designed to find solutions.

Harold Browning is Chief Operations Officer of CRDF. The foundation is charged with funding citrus research and getting the results of that research to use in the grove.



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