

CRDF Defining Itself to Best Serve Growers

By Harold Browning



We all know the old cliché “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” Well, failing is not an option right now as our industry continues to battle HLB in the laboratory and the groves across Florida.

So over the past three months, the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) has undertaken an intensive, strategic planning process designed to provide the organization with a refined focus going forward. A lot has changed since the CRDF was chartered in 2009, and our board of directors wants to make sure we are doing what the growers need us to do.

The CRDF engaged professionals at the Business Talent Group (BTG) to manage the process, which included extensive interviews with CRDF board members, growers and other stakeholders. BTG has coordinated strategic planning for a number of businesses, government agencies and academic institutions. The BTG professionals are experts, and CRDF is confident they have helped provide a roadmap to the future.

The stated goal at the beginning was to undertake an updated and vetted process to define CRDF focus, planning, budget allocations, organization and stakeholder engagement for the next six years.

The CRDF has clearly moved away from funding basic research and toward shepherding product development that can get to the field as soon as possible. We need to find bridge solutions while longer-term solutions are sought. Consequently, strategic planning is a healthy process as this shift takes place.

During the course of the interviews, BTG identified low stakeholder engagement as an issue and said the CRDF should seek to improve industry participation beyond researchers and select growers, finding ways to keep the entire industry apprised of progress and emergence of tools to battle HLB.

This characterization is a bit surprising to those of us who intimately know how the CRDF operates. The CRDF is transparent — run by growers for the benefit of growers. The 13-member board of directors has a supermajority of growers, and all business is conducted in public meetings and subject to Florida Sunshine laws. The CRDF board or its committees meet several times per month at the Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred. Meetings are open to the public, with agendas, minutes and other communications available.

CRDF staff meets with grower groups at their request frequently. The CRDF staff also completes a monthly newsletter that gets distributed via the Florida Citrus Mutual *Triangle* and posted to the CRDF website, as well as this monthly *Citrus Industry* column. In addition to meeting information, the CRDF website (www.citrusrdf.org) contains lists of projects, news updates and background information on the many project areas being pursued.

But with BTG’s recommendations in mind, we will make every effort in the future to improve our relationships with stakeholders. This is very important.

The results to date of the strategic planning are now available on CRDF’s website, and final decisions on directions forward will be posted following the February 23 board meeting.

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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