



MEDIA RELEASE
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For Immediate Release:

Florida Citrus Growers Thank USDA for \$9 million Research Grant

LAKELAND, Fla. (October 1, 2012) – Florida Citrus Mutual thanked the U.S Department of Agriculture today after the agency announced it awarded a \$9 million grant to help support citrus research.

“This is a tremendous opportunity to advance research into citrus greening so we can save our \$9 billion industry,” said Michael W. Sparks, executive VP/CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual. “I must commend Secretary Vilsack for his leadership on this issue and understanding that the key to beating this insidious disease lies in the laboratory.”

Stopping citrus greening or HLB, a bacterial disease that attacks trees, is crucial to the future of Florida citrus. The disease is endemic to the state and has caused billions of dollars in losses over the past five years.

“The effort to secure the grant was multi-state and showed that when faced with a crisis California, Texas and Florida, historically rival citrus producing states, can work together,” Sparks said. “This disease threatens the entire domestic citrus industry.”

The \$9 million will come from the USDA’s Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), a Farm Bill program designed to promote specialty crop research. The funding will support a five year project, submitted by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF), exploring the use of biological controls to neutralize the Asian Citrus Psyllid, the small bug that vectors HLB.

HAROLD QUOTE

“This approach to psyllid management is a missing element of the current research portfolio, one that is well-suited for a national effort”, said Harold Browning, Chief Operating Officer of the CRDF. Although identified earlier as a priority, it is only recent progress in research on psyllid biology that allows this approach to move forward at this time. The intermediate to long-term nature of this research is an excellent complement to the short-term research on suppressing the psyllids with pesticides and other therapies, and will be useful in highly affected areas like Florida, as well as other citrus states that have more limited spread of the insect and the disease. We are excited to add this area of research to the overall efforts to find solutions to this serious disease, both to maintain current capabilities of the industries, as well as to find more permanent solutions against this pest and disease.

The \$ 9 million SCRI grant augments \$2 million in funding the USDA appropriated to the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) facility in Ft. Pierce earlier this year to study citrus greening..

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson has been a long-time proponent of citrus disease research. He worked tirelessly to bring this issue to the attention of the USDA and he has told the industry he remains

committed to establishing a permanent citrus research trust fund financed through a portion of the tariff on imported orange juice.

The Florida citrus industry creates a \$9 billion annual economic impact, employing nearly 76,000 people, and covering more than 500,000 acres. Founded in 1948 and currently representing nearly 8,000 grower members, Florida Citrus Mutual is the state's largest citrus grower organization. For more information, visit www.flcitrusmutual.com.