

# Implementation of New Federal Funding for Citrus Disease Research and its Relationship to CRDF

By Harold Browning



A synopsis of activities within and related to the Florida citrus industry's efforts against huanglongbing (HLB) is provided here. There are a lot of questions stemming from recent funding announcements, including pending actions to mobilize these funds, and also questions of how this will affect CRDF programs.

CRDF is now contracting the new research projects resulting from the 2014 research process. Twenty-eight projects were approved in February and range from 1-year to 3-year projects. These projects are being implemented as we approach the close of our fiscal year. In the same manner, commercial product delivery projects are advancing, focusing on near-term solutions and their evaluation under field conditions.

In relation to the congressional funding recently made available to assist in delivering solutions to HLB, there are three projects moving forward in the first tier via actions of the Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC). Two of these projects address antimicrobial strategies and thermal therapy that reduce *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* (CLAs) titers in infected citrus trees. These have been among the highest short-term priorities for CRDF in preserving the existing production of citrus in Florida.

The third project focuses on expanding the rearing and release programs for biological control of the Asian citrus psyllid (ACP). Existing programs for rearing and release of the ACP parasitoid *Tamarixia radiata* in California, Texas and Florida are being enhanced to provide greater numbers of parasitoids to cover areas not treated for ACP with insecticides. This biological control strategy should reduce rates of transmission of HLB from untreated areas.

Additional projects in the second tier are being planned for the congressional funding program and will be cleared to move forward soon. This program will benefit all citrus states and allow for increased cooperation and collaboration between the states.

The other federal funding recently announced is directed to the USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Specialty Crop Research Initiative. This program will allocate \$25 million per year over the next five years to HLB and other citrus disease research through a competitive grant process run through NIFA. The first round call for pre-proposals will likely occur within the next two months, with the decision on projects to be supported emerging this fall. While CRDF will not be directly connected to this grant process, this new research funding is likely to provide support for much of the work that is currently supported by CRDF through its Research Management Committee at a rate of about \$15 million per year.

The timing of implementation of these two federal funding programs intersects several ongoing processes within CRDF, including the annual call for new research in fall-winter, as well as the Commercial Product Delivery program, which has the goal of moving research results to solutions. There are issues of timing and scope between all of these programs that are being addressed at present, and the goal is to make the best use of these federal funds as well as the grower investment in research that has been in place since 2006.

The federal programs will have a significant impact on increasing the visibility of HLB research nationally, and should expand the current efforts to new scientists and perhaps to pursue new directions toward solutions. At the same time, CRDF will carefully analyze these new programs against its own investments and make adjustments going forward to accommodate the new funding opportunities and to use the grower investment in a more focused and collaborative manner to address the needs of the Florida citrus industry.

*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.*

