

Meeting Challenges, Moving Forward

By Harold Browning



We all recognize that the Florida citrus industry is facing one of the most serious challenges it has dealt with in decades. The introduction of an insect-vectored bacterial disease that can attack both rootstocks and scions of virtually all commercial cultivars, which leads to chronic decline after years of infection, is on everyone's mind all of the time. The monumental efforts of growers and the industry as a whole to respond to this challenge can be considered unprecedented.

The August Citrus Expo is one of many annual meetings where results of ongoing research and delivery of solutions can be communicated. This happens via the two-day educational seminars as well as numerous exhibitors and displays where solutions to growing citrus in the presence of HLB are presented. This year was no exception, with the theme of the Expo being “**Meeting Challenges. Moving Forward.**” With a sold-out exhibit hall and robust educational program, attendees were provided with the latest updates on topics surrounding HLB management.

Also in parallel with CRDF organization and investment, the educational program focused on the targets for intervention among the insect vector, the pathogen and the tree. Sections of the program addressed above-ground treatments and issues, soils, the impact of HLB on root systems, and eventually focused on considerations for new trees. We recognize that success with HLB will require maintenance of tree health for those trees out there in the industry, and the need for their productivity to remain viable until newly planted trees can reach maturity. Thus, the objectives are split between these two goals.

Topics of importance at the Citrus Expo seminars included:

Canopy and Fruit Issues

- Economic benefits of citrus health management areas
- Rationale for removal to manage disease spread — looking to the future
- Progress with Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Multi-Agency Coordinating Group inoculum removal project
- What harvesters are seeing across the industry

Product Solutions Research for HLB and Citrus Canker

- Current progress of CRDF Commercial Product Delivery Committee field trials for managing HLB and canker
- What has been learned with root systems and HLB
- Grower perspective on treatment of root systems to manage tree health

New Plantings

- Current status of Florida citrus nurseries and inventory
- Tolerant rootstocks for pest and disease management
- IFAS sweet orange varieties: the licensing process, challenges and opportunities
- Progress using thermotherapy to rejuvenate HLB-diseased trees
- Motivations and approaches to pest and disease management used by growers who are replanting

Growers wanting to know what their research investment is achieving need only participate in meetings such as the Citrus Expo, Annual Citrus Growers Conference, Florida Citrus Growers Institute and the many University of Florida/IFAS Extension meetings, field days and state and regional grower meetings to realize the intensity of effort, commitment and success in bringing forth new solutions. The pace is slow, but the quest continues, and the Florida industry investment is paying off.

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.



Column sponsored by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation