Funding to Support Huanglongbing Research: Getting Solutions to Citrus Growers

By Harold Browning

In recent months, funding initiatives to support huanglongbing (HLB) solutions have been proposed, discussed, debated, and in some cases, approved. These initiatives collectively are intended to support the continued struggle to discover, test and deliver solutions that will protect existing productive citrus trees in Florida, to promote replanting of new trees, and to manage emerging Asian citrus psyllid (ACP) and HLB threats in other citrus states — namely Texas, Arizona and California.

The value of additional breadth of funding is clear, but the details of how these funds will add to what is being done, and how they will be integrated to accelerate, rather than complicate, ongoing research, product evaluation and outreach to growers in each of the states is unclear. Coordination is the challenge that has the attention of all involved, and as the new funding programs are implemented, this will be a major consideration so that the highest and best use of each funding source can be realized. Among the public funding programs that have been enabled to support HLB research and delivery are the following, with some general details associated with the first announced funding.

Congressional appropriation of $21 million to support HLB solutions

Congress, responding to needs expressed by U.S. citrus growers and their representatives, has committed $21 million to be invested in moving solutions to ACP and HLB into growers hands in the most expeditious way. The federal agency named to administer these funds is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), and the funds are to be invested over the next two years. In announcing this action, the Secretary of Agriculture established a Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC) to assist in reaching across agencies and to expedite development and approval of plans to put these funds to use. The MAC system is used when multiple agencies of the federal government are involved, and in this case, the group is composed of citrus industry stakeholders and state department of agriculture representatives from each citrus state, as well as representatives from USDA agencies. Appointees to this MAC group are charged to oversee direction and implementation of the funding in support of the needs of the collective citrus industries of the United States.

Step-wise planning is under way, with several “shovel-ready” topics being developed for first action. The first of these topics focuses on antimicrobial therapies, thermal therapy and biological control. Following this initial step, a second round of delivery topics has been identified for next phase development and initiation. Finally, the balance of effort will be to solicit, review and prioritize suggestions for HLB management tools from stakeholders, turning these into funded projects in the near-term. A more complete overview of this first effort to utilize federal support for citrus HLB solutions can be found at http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=citrus.html. Topics of interest on this site include:

- Multi-Agency Response to Citrus Disease
- HLB Multi-Agency Coordination Updates
- Quarantine Area Maps for Citrus Greening and Asian Citrus Psyllid
- USDA Efforts to Combat HLB
- State Efforts to Combat HLB
- Industry Efforts to Combat HLB
- Multi-Agency Coordination Group Contacts

Subsequent CRDF columns will outline the relationship of this program to the Farm Bill Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) citrus disease program approved for $25 million per year for five years, and the efforts within the state of Florida to provide legislative support to HLB research and 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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