

Tracking Ongoing Research and Priorities for Citrus

By Harold Browning



CRDF supports a periodic effort to determine how the research that is being funded fits into established research priorities, and how those priorities need to change over time. The focus at present is necessarily pointed at delivering solutions to huanglongbing (HLB), but at the same time, there also is ongoing work on other important disease issues like citrus canker and citrus black spot. Citrus breeding as an area of research has been going on in Florida for more than 100 years. It is the continuation of this work that has led to the possibilities that are emerging with candidate tolerant rootstocks from both U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Services (USDA-ARS) and University of Florida-Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (UF-IFAS) citrus breeding programs. CRDF is supporting HLB-related breeding efforts as well.

The Industry Research Coordinating Committee (IRCC) of CRDF has just completed a process to look at broad research priorities for citrus which include nursery, production, harvesting, processing and fresh fruit needs. Assembly of the portfolio of projects that are being conducted across the United States has been completed, with each project being assigned to the list of revised priorities. These projects are inclusive of CRDF-funded work, but also represent funds from other sources, like the California Research Board, USDA-ARS, UF-IFAS and the Florida Department of Citrus. The IRCC then evaluated the ongoing work and identified gaps where the level of effort appears to be less than is needed to meet the priority. The outcome of this evaluation is a report which identifies the important gaps in research for which attention needs to be directed. In some cases, the gap at present will remain unmet until HLB solutions have stabilized citrus production and resources can be redirected to other needs.

This process, which has taken place over the recent four months, culminated with presentation of the gaps report to the CRDF board of directors at the July 22 meeting. Not surprisingly, the highest ranking gaps are related to HLB, followed by plant improvement (also directed toward solutions to disease problems), citrus canker management, and priority to improve nursery adoption of new rootstocks and scions emerging from the breeding programs. This report is posted on the CRDF website (citrusrdf.org) for use by interested parties.

A parallel effort has recently been initiated to delve deeper into the HLB research programs funded by CRDF and by other organizations, looking at what we have learned and how it is leading toward solutions. This effort is focused on HLB and will identify critical missing pieces of research across the many topics that are being investigated to provide strategies to prevent or respond to infection by HLB and to enhance management of Asian citrus psyllid populations. A joint effort of CRDF with industry support from Florida citrus processors will evaluate each of the core areas that are leading to HLB management tools with the ultimate goal to identify and focus resources on shortening the time to delivery.

This process, expected to be completed over the next six months, will be used by CRDF to refocus resources and programs. In addition, the results of this effort will also provide necessary guidance to the federal funding programs that have emerged to assist in addressing HLB needs.

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.

