HLB Research Beyond CRDF: Florida's Goal Achieved

By Harold Browning

As 2017 draws to a close, the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) is working to redefine the primary directions for its research and delivery programs. Federal funding programs that have emerged over the past four years are covering much of the discovery and knowledge-building research, and are assisting with field implementation of candidate solutions that can be integrated into citrus management systems here in Florida, as well as in Texas, California and other citrus states. A significant portion of these projects that now have federal funding began with CRDF project funding, allowing those early results to guide next-phase priorities. While this has not translated into immediate results for the industry in all cases, it illustrates the value of aggressive pursuit of HLB tools that the Florida industry began investing in more than eight years ago.

The California citrus community has become more attuned to the needs associated with managing HLB, as more dooryard citrus trees in Southern California are confirmed HLB positive. In response, the California Citrus Research Board is expanding its HLB research efforts and has encouraged cooperation with CRDF in areas of common interest, including evaluation of plant germplasm for HLB resistance.

CRDF has forestalled issuing a new call for proposals in light of other funding availability and the ongoing deep evaluation of what has been accomplished to date across the 400 projects that represent the Florida industry research portfolio. In addition, results of the comprehensive external review of research coordinated by CRDF in the United States by the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council will be available in the first quarter of 2018. These results will be incorporated into CRDF planning, allowing for a call for proposals during spring 2018.

Important progress is being made in attracting interested scientists from across the country to participate in finding solutions to HLB, reinforcing the depth of work on this disease conducted in Florida by the University of Florida, U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA)-Agricultural Research Service and other institutions. CRDF's next steps will focus most clearly on delivering and validating short-term tools to assist Florida growers while advancements in plant resistance are made. We anticipate that CRDF committee and board meetings in January 2018 and beyond will refine priorities and determine how best to meet industry needs. Concurrently, federal and other state programs will be planning next-stage research in accordance with their funding cycles.

Florida organized to find solutions to HLB in 2009–10, committing significant resources to developing a management system. Many growers and researchers alike envisioned a larger, nationally coordinated effort that involved other citrus states and the federal government. That system is now well developed. The combined forces of CRDF, the farm bill citrus program, the USDA HLB Multiagency Coordination Group and other citrus state research programs are sharing the responsibilities for continued discovery, testing, delivery and adoption of tools to assist Florida and other U.S. citrus growers. Florida growers have achieved the goal of building a strong system to find HLB solutions, and the fight continues.

Visit citrusrdf.org for more information on CRDF.

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.

CRDF Grower Dollars at work for you

Column sponsored by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation