

Top Goal: Giving Growers Immediate Assistance



By Rick Dantzler

The year 2019 is upon us, so it is time to set personal and professional goals for the new year. In my job as chief operating officer of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF), setting goals requires an understanding of where we have been in order to know where we should go.

Since 2009, CRDF has funded more than 430 research projects, most aimed at whipping HLB since it poses such an existential threat to the industry. These projects have taught us more about citrus greening than ever before, and substantial progress has been made. Still, profit margins are thin and dependent on growers receiving a high price for their fruit, so where do we go from here?

My primary goal for 2019 is funding research projects aimed at giving growers immediate assistance to help them hang on until a greening-resistant tree comes along. What is an example of this? More effectively getting a bacterium-killing agent into the phloem of the citrus tree, where the HLB bacteria lives, is one. If we can land a man on the moon and safely bring him back, then there is no doubt in my mind that we can develop a delivery device that efficiently and directly gets a killing agent into the tree in a way that is cost effective for commercial application.

What are potential killing agents? Bactericides are certainly one, but there are others. For instance, early indications are that a Type R extract from cranberry juice is very lethal against the HLB bacteria. For any killing agent, studies on how long the agent stays in the tree would need to follow, but let's ramp up efforts to get the material into the phloem and see how the trees respond, with the understanding that there is a regulatory process that would need to be followed.

This is an example of applied research, which takes basic knowledge and applies it to practical problems. Improving horticultural practices is another example. Here, we take what we have learned through basic research and apply it to increasing yields and improving the taste of fruit from greening-infected trees. Building upon what we have learned regarding improved horticultural practices is an additional goal of mine for CRDF in 2019.

A new year is a chance to reflect on the preceding year and use knowledge gained to guide actions for the future. It is a process that I hope will guide the actions of CRDF in a way that helps you, the grower. Your ideas are always welcome, so please don't be shy about suggesting direction for CRDF.

Rick Dantzler is chief operating officer of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation.



Column sponsored by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation