

# Why the 3rd International HLB Research Conference is important to CRDF and the industry



By Harold Browning

The 3rd International HLB Research Conference (IRCHLBIII) convened Feb. 4-7 in Orlando, drawing more than 475 registrants from 21 countries to share research progress on HLB. This event has been taking place in alternate years since early in Florida's battle with HLB, and grew out of predecessor scientific exchange meetings focused on citrus canker. The goal from the start was to attract interested scientists from across the globe to share their ideas, progress and results, and to stimulate the group to move quickly toward solutions for use in Florida citrus. Accessory benefits would obviously accrue to other citrus industries, and they have provided partial funding support for these meetings to complement the significant commitment from the Florida industry.

The format of the meeting involved 10 sessions focused on different aspects of the science, including the Asian citrus psyllid, the pathogen and the citrus plant response. In each session, 15-minute oral presentations were made, and complimentary poster presentations were on display for those not presenting orally. In all, more than 160 authors presented their work. The presentations were capped with a keynote presentation on the worldwide spread of *Candidatus Liberibacter* species over time. At the closing dinner, a pair of presentations focused on what has been learned from HLB management efforts in Brazil, and a "bring-it-home" pep talk from Mr. Jerry Newlin, a citrus grower, long-time advocate for citrus research and member of CRDF's Board. He summarized the development of research on HLB that led to the possibility of bringing together such a large number of participants into a "World Team" to find solutions to HLB, and encouraged all to take seriously the need to deliver solutions in a timely way to reverse the impacts of HLB.

How, you might ask, can this meeting of highly technical presentations assist the Florida industry?

- Face-to-face discussions allowed scientists to challenge their colleagues' work and build on each other's progress. Critical assessment of progress is best done by those conducting related work.

- New ideas surfaced that can be explored to move the research forward more effectively.

- Teams are formed or expanded to enhance what individuals are accomplishing.

- The mid-meeting tour of citrus situations in Florida brought home the reality of HLB, and allowed some scientists to observe the disease firsthand for the first time.

- CRDF and others were able to put into perspective the investment made on behalf of Florida citrus in relation to research that is being supported by others.

- Greater awareness of the Florida situation and CRDF's commitment to fund the best research will recruit additional strong proposals for funding consideration.

- Representatives from citrus industries across the country and world communicated regarding strategies, cooperation and shared experiences in managing the disease.

- Those businesses allied with citrus had a chance to hear firsthand what directions the solutions might take and how their businesses might assist in delivery.

- Finally, the synopsis of the technical meeting on March 6 at UF, IFAS, Citrus Research and Education Center at Lake Alfred provides growers with a direct report of the status of research and a digested version of the technical advances that have occurred.

Observers of the process indicated enthusiasm over the tremendous technical progress that was reported since the last meeting, and derived encouragement that solutions are forthcoming from these combined efforts.

*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.*

