

A Christmas Wish List

By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer



With the holidays upon us, I found myself thinking about a citrus industry Christmas wish list. It takes guts to be in the citrus business in these trying times, so we could all use a little help right now.

For growers, nothing is more important than being able to produce a crop of fruit that is marketable. My first wish is that Mother Nature gives growers a good season, one with adequate and well-distributed rainfall and cool winter conditions to induce uniform flowering next spring.

Of course, what good is growing a crop if you can't sell it? My second wish is that all growers find buyers who will pay a price high enough to sustain themselves, their families and their groves.

It's confounding why consumer demand for a product as wholesome as orange and grapefruit juice has declined so much, although we think we know why. My third wish is for increased consumer demand. The good news is this is fixable.

Those who market juice must have the resources to put it in the consciousness of consumers, so my fourth wish is for adequate marketing resources.

Those who sell juice must have products that taste as good as orange and grapefruit juice can be. We've all had juice that is so good it makes you pause and look at what's left in the glass. My fifth wish is that researchers give growers the tools to grow fruit that has juice which is high in Brix and of great color.

Juice must be affordable or it won't be purchased — regardless of how good it is. My sixth wish is that retailers do their part to keep the price of juice within the reach of all consumers.

This wish list began with the need for growers to produce a marketable crop of fruit that can be sold for a reasonable profit. Everything depends on this, so my seventh wish is for the Citrus Research and Development Foundation to have the funds to support the research that growers need. HLB-tolerant or even resistant cultivars, horticultural practices that yield the most and best fruit possible from HLB-infected trees, smart psyllid control, and methods of attacking *Liberibacter* that make it disappear are high on my list.

I firmly believe there will come a time when HLB is in the rearview mirror, demand for citrus juice will increase, and all segments of the industry will prosper. We survive this rough patch only if my eighth wish comes true, so this is the one I pray for the most: unity among citrus industry constituencies.

Unity is different than agreement. Difficult issues will always have differing opinions, but unity demands all segments of the citrus industry come together to do what is best for the industry as a whole. If we stay focused on this goal, we'll work through our differences and keep Florida citrus the king of all agricultural commodities.



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