



# GROWER RESEARCH REPORT

MARCH 2020

## A Message from Rick Dantzler, COO of CRDF

*As I write this, the country is coming off one of its most tumultuous weeks in modern history. The Dow Jones was seesawing 3,000 points in a swing, business owners and employees were facing an uncertain future, cities were on the verge of shutting down, and even life itself seemed to be far from certain. I followed a lady out of Harvest Meat Market who was buying an entire shopping cart's worth of meat. I asked the checkout person if she was cooking for a church. "No," the person said. "People have been doing this for days."*

*I hope she has a big freezer.*

*We don't know where the plans to deal with coronavirus will lead us, and it's easy to conclude that our leaders are overacting. I understand where they are coming from, though. I analogize this to advertising spending: A business can never know when it spent too much but can always tell when it didn't spend enough. If we take these draconian actions to deal with coronavirus and the worst is avoided we'll never know if we overreacted, but if we don't take these actions and things get as bad as many predict, we'll know we didn't do enough. This is certainly a weird time, though.*

*With coronavirus, once again we are relying on science. Relying on science to find a vaccine, to guide us in preventing its spread, and to get us well if we get sick.*

*It's the same with citrus. We are relying on science to help us grow the best and most fruit. Fruit and the juice from it that is so good it brings consumption back to levels approximating the good old days.*

*And a lot is happening at CRDF. I'm constantly amazed at how hard our board works, how committed the members of our committees are to their tasks, and how growers never refuse when asked to assist. Here are a few of the things we have going on:*

### **Select Committee on Plant Improvement:**

Under the capable leadership of chairman Jim Snively, the committee has submitted its report to the CRDF

Board. After meeting for the better part of a year, the committee's report is an excellent snapshot of what our plant improvement efforts from IFAS and the USDA have rendered, and what is in the pipeline of new cultivars. The body of work is remarkable both in terms of quantity and quality, and there is no question but that the scientists CRDF have funded have been busy.

The committee was convened, though, not simply to take an inventory of where we are, but to point out ways to make our plant improvement efforts operate as effectively as possible, and to get the cultivars that growers want and need as quickly as possible.

To this end, one of the primary recommendations in the report is to gradually shift our plant improvement efforts to more closely reflect the way the Florida sugarcane industry performs its plant breeding research. There, the industry has a greater role in deciding what gets developed and what stays in the pipeline for ultimate release. More importantly, the industry is primarily in charge of field testing and data collection.

It is important to realize that the committee understands there are elements of the sugarcane model that can't be replicated with citrus, and that this is not an effort to upset relationships and models that seem to be working well. For example, when the report was released, I heard from some in the fresh fruit industry that they had developed a process of working with the breeders that was working well, and they were concerned that this might be interrupted. That is certainly not the intention, and I'm sure we can guard against it.

Also, the processors have begun an at large-scale field trial of mostly orange-like hybrids that has the acronym CHAMP. With it, too, the intention is not to interfere. Perhaps there could be synergy in combining these efforts at some point, but only if that is the will of the industry and its subparts.

Procedurally, a working group will be meeting in mid-April to discuss these and other questions. The specific

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time and place will be posted on the CRDF website. Everyone is invited.

### **Nutrition Request for Proposals:**

The CRDF Research Management Committee has completed its work on a new RFP for nutrition. Because plant nutrition has become so pivotal to raising citrus trees successfully in the HLB era, we knew the importance of getting it right. To this end, again with growers who freely gave of their time, a working group was established to assist the RMC in the work product. The RFP has been approved by RMC and sent to the board for consideration, which it will do next week.

The RFP is broken down into three broad categories: Nutrient application to soil vs. foliage application; Mode of fertilization to soil; and Nutrient impact on fruit quality. Naturally, each of these categories has numerous sub-parts.

This is not, of course, the first occasion when nutrition has been the focus of CRDF-funded research. We made a concerted effort, though, with the assistance of researchers who on more than one occasion during our deliberations said, "Don't fund that; we already know the answer," to not include that which had already been researched. I think we hit the mark and am looking forward to the proposals we receive, assuming the board moves the RFP along.

### **Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) funding:**

MAC is a funding program of the USDA that brings citrus-producing states together for a coordinated approach to HLB research. Heretofore, it aimed to fund "shovel ready" projects, or those projects that would end with a shovel-ready tool for growers at the end of the project.

Over time, it became somewhat of a catch-all for research projects, so there is new legislative direction to focus the research more on research that answers questions that can be used in the field. In some ways, it's a distinction without a difference, but CRAFT is a good example of a program that fits well with the new approach.

While still evolving, another thing that will be new is the Citrus Mutuals from the citrus-producing states will have an enhanced role in the process. Because of this, CRDF is working closely with Florida Citrus Mutual to move projects along that fit the criteria.

To keep things as objective as possible, we have reviewed the projects from our 2019 RFP that were not funded but which were "invited," meaning the researchers were invited to submit a detailed proposal that was reviewed by the members of our Scientific Advisory Board and our ad hoc reviewers for scientific merit and likelihood of resulting in something growers could use. These reviewers are leading scientists from across the country who CRDF leans upon heavily for scientific advice.

A handful of these projects fit the new criteria. Just because they weren't funded by CRDF last year does not necessarily mean they shouldn't be funded elsewhere because each funding agency has its own criteria. I anticipate these projects being among those on the list that goes to FCM.

### **Bayer:**

I used a lot of ink in previous grower reports explaining the project which CRDF, PepsiCo and Coca-Cola have with Bayer Crop Science, so I won't go through it again, but at \$12,610,000, it is the most expensive in CRDF's history.

The project is paid through June 30, 2020, but at a burn rate of nearly \$5 million a year we couldn't sustain it. Consequently, we decided to scale it down and pursue a NIFA grant through the USDA to continue the project.

To fund the project until a decision on the NIFA grant is made, the three funding partners plus a new one, the California Citrus Research Board (CRB), have agreed to provide bridge funding. We are very grateful to CRB for its assistance and hope that this paves the way for more cooperative ventures as we work to get the most bang for the buck for our research dollars.

### **Legislative funding:**

CRDF never takes for granted the funding it receives from growers through the box tax, legislators through the state budget, or members of Congress and executive branch officials through USDA programs. Our approach is that it must be earned every year.

Regarding legislative appropriations, we are not allowed to lobby so we rely on Florida Citrus Mutual to carry our needs to policymakers, and have they delivered! CRDF was again successful in securing an \$8 million appropriation, with \$3 million ear-marked for large-scale field trials. I began most weeks during the legislative session with a call to Matt Joyner to see how we were doing. Between he and Mike Sparks, they handled things magnificently, for which we are very grateful. I'd try to thank the legislators and other policymakers who helped, but since I wasn't there, I'd surely omit someone. Suffice it to say, though, that the Florida citrus industry has many friends in high places.

*In closing, I know there are problems in the industry and coronavirus has turned the world upside down, but isn't this a wonderful time of the year? Bloom and Valencias are on the tree together, and is there anything more beautiful or does anything smell as wonderful as that?*

*This industry is worth fighting for, and we will keep at it. Thank you for having the courage to be a citrus grower.*



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