

A Glorious Time of the Year



By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer

I'm working from home as I write this, and the country is coming off one of its most tumultuous weeks ever. The stock market was seesawing 3,000 points in a swing. Business owners were facing an uncertain future. Hundreds of thousands of employees were laid off. The American economy was on the verge of shutting down. Governors were issuing orders for entire states to "shelter in place," and even life itself seemed far from certain.

I followed a lady out of Harvest Meat Market whose shopping cart was completely full 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."

Strange times, indeed.

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 the thinking of our leaders, 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.

With coronavirus, once again we are relying on science. We're 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. We want fruit and the juice from it that is so good it brings consumption back to levels approximating the good old days.

Gosh, I love this industry. While I was never a grower per se, my father had groves and I owned a 20-acre grove off Water Tank Road east of Lake Hamilton for a while, but I never depended on it for my living. My work in the groves was more as a day laborer or, perhaps more accurately, a summer laborer. I've been mostly an observer, helping the industry from the Legislature whenever I could and marveling at all that it is.

When a Ben Hill Griffin or a Joe Marlin Hilliard would come into my office, I'd sit amazed, thinking of what they and their families had accomplished. Or I'd sit around the fire at the hunting camp with a Fred Klote or a Herbie Pollard, growers of far fewer acres but who were providing for their families, nonetheless, and I'd think of all that this industry has provided for so many.

It's the time of the year when bloom and Valencias are on the tree together. Is there anything more beautiful? This industry is worth fighting for. This country is worth fighting for. We'll whip HLB and coronavirus and anything else that has the misfortune of getting in our way. Mark my words.



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