

# A Fair and Informed Funding Process



By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer

In March, CRDF was criticized in a Florida newspaper by a representative of a product which he claimed works well against HLB. The crux of the criticism was that CRDF would not test his product, and instead was more interested in funding “expensive products from politically connected chemical multinationals.”

The criticism stung for several reasons.

First, the company that is upset submitted a project proposal for consideration as part of our 2019 request for proposals (RFP). Ninety-one proposals were received; eight were funded. This company’s proposal was not funded, but it received the same objective review and consideration as the other 90.

Second, CRDF does not typically do its own research. We are primarily a funding agency, funding proposals received through an RFP. This allows all persons and companies to have an equal opportunity at having their project funded. Occasionally, a proposal comes along that we believe warrants special consideration and it will be considered “off cycle,” but even these are subjected to objective analysis by scientists from across the country who serve on our Scientific Advisory Board.

Third, I know how hard our board works to fund the projects that offer the most potential for benefit to citrus growers.

I am often contacted by persons who claim to have a product that holds the solution to HLB. They show me before and after pictures of a few trees, sometimes data that indicate a reduction in bacterial titer, and other evidence which they believe warrants CRDF investment. Some of these good people want CRDF to research the product for them or confirm what they believe. Others are motivated by a commercial interest and are seeking the CRDF seal of approval. All hope to benefit the citrus industry.

Nevertheless, with dozens of companies and even more products that claim to effectively treat citrus disease, we can’t test everyone’s product. Instead, we set up an objective process where each is given the same opportunity at funding. It is competitive, and we seek advice from leading scientists from across the country. I’m sure we miss a few, but it keeps the process above board.

Funding projects from RFPs is not the only way we try to help. We often assist in finding grower-cooperators or connect persons with a product to a researcher who might be able to help gather enough data to warrant further testing. If the active ingredient is a bactericide, after vetting, we’ll offer to test the ingredient with the high-throughput system Bayer Crop Sciences has created with CRDF support.

CRDF’s model is to fund research, often proofs of concept, and turn the knowledge learned over to the private sector for commercialization. There have been times in the past, like with bactericides or gene work, when CRDF has assisted with commercialization because of scope, scale, regulatory cost or potential industry impact, but not often. The marketplace is where product winners and losers are generally sorted out.

CRDF is open to all comers. Our goal is to solve HLB — regardless of where the solution comes from.

