

Funding Fewer Projects



By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer

The volume and breadth of Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) projects from over the years is astounding. We just passed our 11th year of existence. Here's an accounting of where we have been, where we are and where we are going.

Over its existence, CRDF has funded 457 projects at a cost of \$139,377,300.17. The Bayer project, at \$14,297,700, has been the most expensive. The least expensive, at \$5,425, was a project by Eric Triplett to develop an antimicrobial assay to inhibit *Liberibacter crescens*, the closest cultured relative of the citrus greening pathogen.

We assign the projects to 13 general categories. The category with the most projects is "HLB epidemiology and mitigation of HLB by cultural practices." The category with the fewest is "Citrus genomics and transcriptomics."

CRDF survives primarily on two sources of income:

1. Three pennies of box tax, most recently ratified by growers in February 2016. This authorization became effective on Aug. 1, 2016. It expires on July 31, 2022, if not re-authorized by referenda (grower referendum held every six years).
2. State legislative appropriation. For the last five years, the appropriation has been \$8 million per year, except for in 2018 when it was \$4 million.

In the last two years, the Legislature has required CRDF to spend \$5 million of the \$16 million appropriation on the Citrus Research and Field Trial program. So, in the last two years, we have had \$5 million fewer dollars to support our traditional research portfolio. We do not object to this requirement, but this redirection of funds has begun to pinch.

With fewer dollars, we began funding fewer projects. To illustrate how discerning CRDF has become, in 2018 it funded 38 of 113 pre-proposals. In 2019, it funded eight of 93. In 2020, only three of 27 were funded.

Nevertheless, CRDF still has 53 projects under contract, some of which last until 2023. Regardless, do not worry about whether we have sufficient funds for worthy projects. The board is exercising proper oversight of spending, and monies are available for industry needs.

For example, there are numerous projects CRDF is evaluating that will likely be considered "off-cycle," which is a mechanism available to our Commercial Products Delivery Committee, chaired by John Updike, to consider projects that aren't part of a request for proposal (RFP).

We fully expect funding trends to get back to where they were, where we work with growers to identify general research needs, draft an RFP to address them and request pre-proposals. Until then, expect CRDF to do more off-cycle projects or take more of a "directed research" approach, where we identify a specific need, determine who can best address it, and work with those scientists to develop a project and budget around it. This is an efficient way to fund research, but as a quasi-public body, we must adhere to certain safeguards and standards. However, it can be done.

