

Deliberating Over Funding Decisions

By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer



It is the time of the year when the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) is deciding which proposals to fund. The legislative appropriation we received this year was less than in the past, so we won't be able to fund as many projects. Nevertheless, we received many excellent proposals on the following topics:

1. Increasing fruit retention in HLB trees by manipulating hormonal balance
2. Relationship between root health and fruit drop
3. HLB management with plant growth regulators/protective tree covers
4. Control of sting nematode root damage to reduce young tree losses
5. Device/method for tree injection of therapeutics directly into the phloem
6. Assay for tree response to therapies for HLB control
7. Screening for potent peptides to prevent HLB infection or induce tree resistance
8. Tree size-controlling rootstocks in high-density planting to enable mechanical harvesting
9. Control of grapefruit rind blotch/potential causes of greasy spot/green symptoms
10. Plant breeding for HLB tolerance/resistance
11. Citrus nutrition to improve fruit production/quality
12. HLB therapeutics and their mode of action

These topics were chosen from our interaction with growers and our solicitation for research topics. The request for proposals was recommended by the CRDF Research Management Committee (RMC) and ratified by the board.

Pre-proposals were then accepted. A pre-proposal is a two-page summary of what the project would be.

The 63 pre-proposals were then sent to the members of our Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), eminent scientists from across the country who advise us on the scientific merit of the ideas. The RMC then reviewed the SAB remarks and the pre-proposals and made recommendations to the board about which projects should be "invited," meaning the idea was compelling enough to warrant a full proposal, which is a long document, often more than 50 pages. These recommendations went to the board for ratification, which included 27 invited projects.

When the researchers were notified that they had been invited to submit a full proposal, I provided them with comments that had been made to take into consideration when preparing the full proposal.

A total of 24 full proposals were submitted and sent to our several dozen *ad hoc* advisors, who are scientists from the United States, Brazil, Australia and Spain, for their input. Each proposal was assigned to two or three *ad hoc* advisors. Their comments, along with the full proposals, were sent to the SAB, which met for a day and a half to go over each project in detail.

CRDF staff pulled together all input into an analysis to assist the RMC and board in their deliberations regarding which projects to fund. The RMC will soon go over each proposal and recommend which ones to support. Heavy deference will be given to the RMC recommendations, but the board will balance the desire to fund projects with available funds.

As you can see, it is quite a process.

