

# Grower Referendum Explained



By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer

**N**ext month there will be a referendum on whether to preserve the mechanism that allows growers to tax themselves up to three pennies per box of fruit to fund citrus research. This mechanism is called the Citrus Research Order. Funds raised through the order, along with legislative appropriation, is how the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) is funded.

The vote will not be on whether to assess three pennies of tax (or any amount, for that matter); the vote will be only whether to keep the mechanism for assessment in place. Here's how the process works:

By law, the CRDF board of directors serves as the advisory council to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) for the order. In June of every year, the advisory council meets to decide whether to recommend to FDACS that an assessment be made, and if so, how much the assessment should be (no more than three pennies). CRDF simply makes a recommendation; the assessment becomes operative only by action and with the concurrence of FDACS.

An assessment is not required, and CRDF will do as the industry wishes. Why? Because CRDF exists to serve growers and is set up organizationally to make sure that happens. By statute, 10 of the 13 board members are growers. Five are nominated by Florida Citrus Mutual, and five are nominated by the Florida Department of Citrus, so grower control on the board is ensured.

CRDF's committees also have a supermajority of growers serving on them. For example, CRDF has just combined both of its research committees into one, and 13 of the 17 members of this committee are growers. The Select Committee on Plant Improvement has a similar supermajority of growers, too.

The point is, CRDF will do what growers desire because it is growers we serve.

As you consider how to vote, there are several considerations to keep in mind.

First, when seeking funding from legislators, those who have represented CRDF in Tallahassee and Washington have said it helps to be able to say that growers are paying part of the bill.

Second, sooner or later, HLB is going to be behind us but there will be other research needs to deal with emerging threats, cultivar improvements and production practices. If legislative funding dries up, it would be helpful for growers to have a mechanism in place to help themselves.

Finally, if the mechanism is lost, what are the chances of it ever coming back?

I am not encouraging you to vote either way. In fact, CRDF is not allowed to lobby. My goal, instead, is to help growers understand that it is the mechanism they are voting on whether to keep in place, not the tax itself.

We're all disappointed that the research has not been more successful, but we are on the cusp of significant breakthroughs. If you want to speak with me or want me to speak to your group, I'm happy to do so.



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