

A Possible Game Changer and Other Projects



By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer

My deadline for submitting this column came just as the results of a grower referendum on whether to continue the mechanism of self-assessment that has provided much of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation's (CRDF) funding were announced. The results showed that 76% of the ballots returned were a "yes" in favor of continuing the order. I will address this in more detail in a subsequent column.

In last month's column, I wrote about injecting oxytetracycline (OTC). Why? Because it could be a real game changer if the research proves successful. OTC could increase production levels and fruit quality to align more closely with what we had before the precipitous decline caused by HLB. This is the only research that we have identified that could be a true game changer in the short run, and a game changer is what we most need.

Since that column appeared, Ute Albrecht, a plant physiologist with the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), continues to test various OTC formulations and rates. Also, a company that will soon be submitting a Section 24(c) registration for its product has had further conversations with state regulators. I still believe it is possible for this to be approved by late summer or early fall.

CRDF recently attended a meeting with growers, regulators and researchers regarding the black spot program in Southwest Florida. This has been a terribly frustrating issue because the program does not seem to be anchored in science.

It is my sense that progress in finding a compromise that helps Florida growers without hurting those who export to Europe was made. CRDF will stay on this and do what it can to make sure the program is based on accurate science.

The final year of work on UF/IFAS entomologist Lauren Diepenbrock's mealybug project was approved, but not without a vigorous debate in meetings with the CRDF Research Management Committee and with the board. As one committee member said: "Our hair is on fire, and it's hard to spend money on something other than HLB right now." However, a funding compromise was reached between the committee meeting and the board meeting, so the board decided to accept the compromise and finish out the work, because there are many growers dealing with mealybug problems.

In addition, a project dealing with novel zinc products and advancements in work with brassinosteroids to increase yield and fruit quality was approved.

Two projects were deferred. One had to do with studies on products containing gibberellic acid, 2,4-D and cytokinin. The board thought more information from the researcher was needed. The second was a series of field trials involving injecting OTC. Since CRDF had already funded Albrecht to do this and because the companies have their own research underway to support their registration efforts, it was not clear what additional research would add. We did not kill the proposal but deferred it to see if a more productive role for our research dollars presented itself.



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