

A Big Year in Store

By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer



Last month, I intended to tie a bow on 2022 and end with an outline of what I saw as the path forward for 2023. But I ended up writing a column on something else. Then, on Jan. 1, I heard a sermon that was a benediction on 2022 and a blessing for 2023. This made me think I should revisit my intention of writing a column about 2022 and 2023.

You'll be pleased to know that I'm not going to write about 2022 other than to say I'm glad it's over. We know our backs are against the wall, but 2023 is going to be the year that therapies improve the current situation. New ways of using gibberellic acid, brassinosteroids and 2,4-D will stabilize production, and the use of a recently approved bactericide inserted directly into the tree will begin a slow and steady rise in fruit quantity and quality. Funding from the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) will help maximize efficacy of these treatments, validate efficacy, and crack open the door on new and exciting advancements.

CRDF recently funded several new projects that are novel and intriguing.

First, we funded Soilcea, which is the only company we know of that is actively working to get several non-GMO trees that are resistant to HLB through the regulatory process. Funding will enable Soilcea to propagate enough trees for replicated trials and to get these trees into the field for testing.

Second, we funded a continuation project of Manjul Dutt's to determine what it is about the Parson Brown orange that seems tolerant to HLB. Dutt is a University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) assistant professor.

Third, we funded another project by Dutt to create a wide variety of interstocks. An interstock builds a bridge between the rootstock and scion with a variety known to be resistant or tolerant to HLB but is not something that works on its own. Hopefully, it will convey this resistance or tolerance into the scion.

Fourth, we funded a project by Amit Levy, a UF/IFAS assistant professor, to determine if three compounds put into a tree through a systemic delivery device could unclog the phloem of callose. Callose builds up in the phloem of trees suffering from HLB, negatively affecting sugar transport. So, reduction of callose should make for healthier trees.

CRDF has a request for proposal (RFP) that is live. It is on "game changers," those research projects that, if successful, could save the industry and not just provide incremental benefit. We are working on another RFP to present to the Research Management Committee on other products — like nutritionals or pesticides — that can be inserted directly into the tree along with bactericides.

And last but certainly not least, CRDF has a new president. Morgan McKenna Porter is bringing passion for the industry and enthusiasm to the job. She does her homework and has a clear idea of what she wishes to accomplish.

2023 is going to be a big year.



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