

# OTC Treatment Timeline



By Rick Dantzer, CRDF chief operating officer

**W**ith the Florida citrus harvest well underway, early reports on the effects of injecting oxytetracycline are coming in. The results are mixed. Nearly all growers are seeing an improvement in tree health and Brix levels, but pound solids are lower due to lower juice content per box. So, what do we make of this? A timeline helps in the analysis.

Despite a severe freeze in January of 2022, 2022–23 was setting up to be a decent season — all things considered. Therapies such as strategic usage of 2,4-D, gibberellic acid and brassinosteroids were giving new hope that fruit drop caused by HLB would be appreciably less. Then, on Sept. 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian — a Category 4 hurricane — slammed into southwestern Florida and ripped its way through “citrus alley.” Many areas were simply clobbered; there is no other way to put it.

Following the hurricane, a minor freeze in late December did a little damage. That was followed by a significant drought that didn’t break until May 2023.

In the middle of these weather calamities, the effort to get the ReMedium TI injectable oxytetracycline (OTC) product approved by state and federal authorities was underway. In January of 2023, it received its label and came onto the market. The second OTC product — Rectify — came out a month later. Given the learning curve growers had to go through, it was not until late spring before they were able to begin injecting product.

To say that trees received their first injection when they were stressed by these weather events and HLB is an understatement. So, it begs the question: Without these weather events, what would have been a reasonable expectation from one injection? Growers who have tinkered with this therapy for years indicate that a 15% increase in production, primarily from reduced fruit drop, can be expected in the first year. However, with these weather events, I’m not surprised that pound solids and production are down in some cases.

There are many reports that Hamlin groves that were well managed and wind-protected from Hurricane Ian are experiencing reduced fruit drop, which could reasonably be attributed to the OTC treatments. There is no doubt, though, that groves in high elevations that were in the path of Hurricane Ian have little to no fruit due to high winds and extreme root damage from being shaken for hours.

I see little reason to believe that injecting OTC isn’t working, and there is a lot of anecdotal evidence that it is. Also, it’s encouraging to know that the same growers who have been experimenting with injecting OTC for years believe that a 30% increase the second year (again, primarily from reduced drop) and a third year that is off to the races are reasonable expectations.

I’m still bullish on the therapy and believe it will bring the industry back to sustainability and growth, allowing growers to keep going until a sufficiently greening-tolerant or -resistant tree solves the problem for good.



Column sponsored by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation