

Conference Proves Beneficial

By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer



The recent Florida Citrus Industry Annual Conference brought together citrus growers, organizations and researchers to celebrate the end of a fruit season and begin preparations for the next. It was a time to take stock, gather as members of a great industry, have fun and decide how best to move forward.

The Citrus Research and Development Foundation's (CRDF) first order of business at the conference was consideration of the tax rate for research funding that it recommends to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. I view this revenue source not as an entitlement, but as something to be earned each year. Consequently, we explain to growers how we spent their research dollars, where CRDF stands financially and how we intend to spend future funds. This year, the board chose to recommend leaving the rate at two pennies per box, which it has been for the last two years, down from three pennies per box previously.

Second was approval of CRDF's budget for the next fiscal year. We are grateful for the \$4.5 million appropriated to CRDF by the Florida Legislature. This allows us to continue funding the 62 projects under contract and to budget \$1.2 million for additional research projects for the new year. Following this was consideration of 18 research matters. Plant breeding and the use of anti-bacterials were the largest research categories.

At the educational session, CRDF sponsored nine outstanding presentations. Eight topics were in keeping with CRDF's research strategy of helping growers reduce CLas titer as much as possible to enable them to keep going until they have the "tree of the future," and one was on the Citrus Research and Field Trial programs. A grower told me afterward that he hadn't been this hopeful in years, which I took as a sign that the presentations were beneficial.

A few takeaways from the session:

- Charlie Messina (UF/IFAS) has created an inventory of GM and non-GM CRISPR edits, which will allow the development of a plan to move this work along as efficiently as possible.
- Yianni Lagos (Soilcea) shared the latest on gene-edited trees that might just be good enough.
- Lukasz Stelinski (UF/IFAS) has advanced work on trees with a *Bt* gene added that kills diapaepes larvae and psyllid nymphs.
- Ute Albrecht (UF/IFAS) explained fruit development and how to use oxytetracycline (OTC) to maximize fruit quality and size.
- Tara Wade (UF/IFAS) compiled data to help growers understand the economics of OTC therapy.
- Michelle Heck (USDA) and the Grove-First team have identified rotational partners for OTC which can be used now, if necessary.
- Nian Wang (UF/IFAS) has created a tree with a non-GM, CRISPR-edited scion that appears to be HLB resistant. This might just be what we have been waiting for. If so, it will then be up to the industry to make it available to growers as quickly as possible. More on this is coming in the near future.



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