



CITRUS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION, INC.

Research Management Committee

Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2026

A meeting of the Research Management Committee of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation, Inc. was held on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at the Hampton Inn Conference Room, 22900 US Hwy 27, Lake Wales, Florida. The meeting was properly noticed and recorded. The meeting was called to order at 10:03 AM by Chairman Matt Machata. Roll was called and a quorum was present. Committee members participating were Dr. Scott Adkins, Dan Bott, Holly Chamberlain, Dr. John Davis, Deeley Hunt, Matt Machata, Charlie McKee, Riley McKenna, Aaron Nelson, Morgan Porter, Daniel Scott, Dr. Brian Scully and John Updike.

Mr. Machata stated that the March 24, 2026, Research Management Committee Meeting Minutes were included with the meeting materials. Dr. Adkins moved to accept the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Porter and passed unanimously.

Mr. Machata asked Mr. Dantzler to update the committee on available funding. Dantzler explained that the reason uncommitted funds remain higher than usual was because several research topics mentioned in the legislative request for the current year were no longer being pursued. This resulted in the potential for additional funds to be made available to fund additional CRAFT projects currently on the waiting list.

He noted that Dr. Rob Gilbert has been invited to attend the April 28 Board meeting to discuss the royalties issue regarding conventionally bred cultivars. In the event that this issue is not resolved, it may be necessary to set aside certain funds to pursue resolution in court. . The goal is a resolution with UF that is agreeable to all parties.

Dr. Leandro Pena, with whom CRDF has contracted to sort out proposals on biotechnology, will also be present at the Board meeting; all are invited to be a part of this discussion.

Mr. Machata continued with the full proposal by Dr. Yu Wang #25-019, 'Using Machine Learning on Juvenile Leaf Chemistry to Predict Future Sweet Orange Juice Quality.' Dr. Syvertsen summarized the project and SAB reviews. Dr. Scully noted this doesn't shorten juvenility but assists with the selection process. If it works for citrus, it should work for other fruit crops as well, including mangos. Dr. Scully asked if it would be wise to select a rootstock and have all the juvenile trees grafted on that rootstock. This should be tested under HLB

pressure as well as on non-HLB trees. Ms. Porter noted that while this is a project the researchers can use, it will help growers in the long run. Dr. Scully moved to recommend board approval of funding. The motion was seconded by Mr. Updike and passed.

Mr. Machata continued with an off-cycle preproposal from Dr. Can Baysal, 'Engineering Durable Citrus Tolerance to Huanglongbing via Rational Multi-Layer Defense Stacking,' and had Dr. Dawson summarize the project. The ultimate objective is to take transgenic plants and test them in greenhouses and labs, to identify what should be field-tested. It was questioned why juvenile tissue transformation was being used first, and whether it would be better to go straight to mature tissue transformation. The reviewers were somewhat cool to the proposal and had questions related to gene selection and questioned using the Golden Gate system. Stacking so many genes into one plant was questioned, and there was a thought that it might be better to stack genes with antimicrobial peptides. Justification is needed. Dr. Scully moved to recommend the Board invite a full proposal with better specificity on why Baysal selected his gene targets. Dr. Heck suggested explaining the 'how' in the full proposal as well as the why, and that the project could benefit from molecular biologist input. The motion was seconded by Mr. McKee and passed.

Mr. Machata continued with the preproposal received from Dr. Nicole Quinn, 'Advancing Entomopathogenic Endophytic Fungi (EEF) as a Sustainable Biological Control Strategy for Pest and Pathogen Defense,' asking Dr. Graham to summarize. The project looks at how EEF colonize citrus, which can take months, and makes the case for a biocontrol agent which has not been demonstrated. The first three of four reviews were mostly negative with the fourth being somewhat positive; the \$4 million request was a concern to all. Proof of concept first should be considered and if something promising comes from it, move forward.

Dr. Terri Price, a co-PI, weighed in saying they have been working with Grove First and UF/IFAS and have produced papers that have not yet been published from a 6-month field trial. They also discovered a mode of action where spores can enter through the stomata of the plant. In recent months they noticed a decrease in colonization, dropping to 25%. A long-term goal is to identify the endophytes to enhance the efficacy of chemicals. She said proof of concept can be done at a dramatically reduced cost. Mr. Machata asked if the compounds were already available and did the research team approach CRAFT. Dr. Heck said it requires more research before it can be a Grove First screening model. There is also a regulatory pathway to follow. Mr. Updike moved to invite a full proposal on the screening portion of the project. Dr. Price offered to send the publications as well as a summary of the costs. Dr. Heck said they may be able to save on costs using newly planted trees that have been treated with OTC or starting with trees in the nurseries and getting them in the ground. The motion was seconded by Ms. Porter and passed.

Mr. Machata continued with the consideration of continuing cost-shared funding for the Southern Gardens Citrus Diagnostic Laboratory. The lab continues to be utilized by growers, plant breeders and private companies, and can now distinguish between live and dead DNA. More usage is anticipated with new genetic constructs coming online. Mr. Ireby has suggested a few different funding scenarios for the proposal. Currently, SGCDL covers a third of personnel costs, as well as re-agents, equipment, computers and indirect costs. Mr. Updike moved to recommend the Board approve funding for an additional year up to \$250,000. The motion was seconded by Mr. McKee and passed.

Mr. Machata next brought up the consideration of awarding unexpended 2025-26 legislative funds to CRAFT. Ms. Porter moved to recommend the Board transfer any remaining 2025-26 Legislative funds to CRAFT under their current contract. The motion was seconded by Mr. McKee and passed.

Under Other Business, Dr. Dawson shared a conversation with a researcher who developed a CLas elicitor protein which was rubbed on trees and produced a hyper response. It has the potential to be a complete resistance gene creating immunity to the disease. The committee was interested and directed Mr. Dantzler to request a full proposal.

Michele Heck provided an update on the progress of the Grove First project and status with USDA and APHIS. Data from last year's work should be available to the board and committee in the next couple of weeks.

With no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 11:40 AM.