

HLB bacterium delisted; greening research to benefit

By Tim Spann

The Federal Register on Oct. 16 announced that the USDA / APHIS had decided to remove *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* and *C. L. africanus* from the Select Agent and Toxin List, effective Nov. 17. Also announced was that *C.L. americanus* would not be added to the list as proposed. These three bacteria are believed to be the causal agents of citrus greening disease (a.k.a. Huanglongbing, HLB).

The Select Agent List is part of the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2002, which mandates that the secretary of agriculture must establish a list of biological agents and toxins that “pose a severe threat to animal or plant health, or to animal or plant products.” The list includes such things as botulinum neurotoxin producing bacteria, anthrax, avian influenza virus (“bird flu”), and the Citrus Variegated Chlorosis (CVC) strain of *Xylella fastidiosa*. The list is designed to protect U.S. agriculture from the listed pathogens by limiting the number of facilities and people who have access to the pathogens and restricting the conditions on working with the pathogens.

The listing of an agent mandates that certain, very strict protocols and procedures be followed in order to work with the agent. One of these requirements is an extensive federal background check of any researcher wishing to receive

clearance to work with the agent.

In addition, facilities (laboratories, greenhouses, etc.) must meet specific security requirements. In the case of greening, these requirements meant that only a small proportion of the facilities at CREC, USDA Fort Pierce and other institutions (in Florida and across the country) met the security requirements and only some of the researchers working on citrus had received the required security clearance. This limited the research that could be done in many ways, but arguably the greatest restriction was the amount of secure space available to accommodate all of the research.

The de-listing of the greening bacterium will now allow all of us who have research ideas to act on them. In addition, researchers at all institutions — not just UF/IFAS — who were not previously cleared to work with the disease will now be able to do so. The result is that both the intellectual and physical resources available to find a solution to greening have increased many fold.

More information about the rule change can be found by visiting the Federal Register Web site at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/> and searching for “candidatus”. The complete Select Agent and Toxin List can be viewed by going to the APHIS Web site <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/> and searching for “select agent list”.