



Standing Tall

High-minded growers should take a look at high-headed trees when considering the use of mechanical harvesting.



High-headed nursery trees are grown in an approved structure as required by the new Florida Citrus Nursery Stock Certification Program.

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The Florida citrus industry has gone through the most dynamic change during the past two years as any time in history. Losses in acreage from canker-control actions along with the discovery of greening disease have changed production practices for both growers and nurserymen. On the grower side, production cost has increased due to disease control costs. On the nursery side, the Citrus Nursery Stock Certification Program Rule 5B-62 became effective January 2007, requiring all citrus nursery stock to be grown in DPI-approved protective structures. This eliminated outside "field nursery" production.

Florida citrus nurseries have for the past 20 years produced between four and six million saleable trees annually. The past couple years, tree production was reduced to between one to two million trees. Currently, there are about 40 nurseries propagating trees for commercial plantings, down from the 290 citrus nurseries in 1985. The current annual tree capacity is estimated at three million sale-

able trees annually from nurseries in protected structures.

The loss of producing trees to canker-control actions under the 1,900-foot rule and citrus greening disease have increased nursery tree demand for resets and replanting blocks within groves. The current disease pressure has growers and nurserymen working together more than in previous years. These new relationships,

along with the need to replant large blocks, present a unique opportunity. By establishing uniform plantings of high-headed trees suitable for mechanical harvesting, growers may be able to decrease their harvesting cost. With availability for harvesting labor questionable, the ability to harvest fruit with a greatly reduced labor force deserves serious consideration.

High Headed Trees

Growing high-headed trees in greenhouses requires nurseries to extend the time of production and gain a larger caliper trunk to support a tree with branching starting at 24 inches. Due to this change, more advanced planning is needed. Although the time required to produce the tree is greater, and there is some delay in planting, the benefits of decreased harvesting costs, shorter time to harvest from planting, and decreased tree exposure time to diseases could offset delays in planting. High-headed trees are well suited for mechanical harvest. Other high-headed facts include:

- High-headed trees have a longer than normal trunk that has the scaffold branching beginning at 24



Nursery trees headed at 24 inches are suitable for mechanical harvesting.