

That Shrinking Feeling

Declining acreage trends indicate a continued slide in Florida orange production.

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While much has been written and said about the decline in orange juice consumption in the U.S., something that has been overlooked has been the decline in Florida orange juice production. From the period extending from 1994-1995 through 2003-2004, Florida produced orange crops exceeding 200 million boxes in all seasons but one. The hurricanes arrived in 2004 and again in

2005, and Florida orange production dropped below 150 million boxes. While the crop recovered somewhat in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, production declined to 133 million boxes in 2009-2010 and has struggled to exceed 140 million boxes in the past two seasons.

As shown in the accompanying figure below, much of the decline in orange production can be traced to the decline in orange-bearing acreage. After peaking at more than 850,000 acres in 1996-1997, all citrus acreage declined to 541,000 acres in

2010-2011. In the case of oranges, the decline in bearing acreage was from 625,000 acres in 1996 to 440,000 acres last season, a reduction of nearly 30%. This decline can be attributed a number of factors. The hurricanes caused some tree loss, but this period also saw the citrus canker eradication program, which resulted in the eradication of more than 65,000 acres of citrus statewide. The rural land boom associated with the run-up in housing prices also was a factor. Growers with some hurricane damage, combined with possibly with disease issues such as citrus canker or HLB chose to abandon groves instead of rehabilitating. As such, the state witnessed the largest contraction of citrus acreage since the freezes of the 1980s.

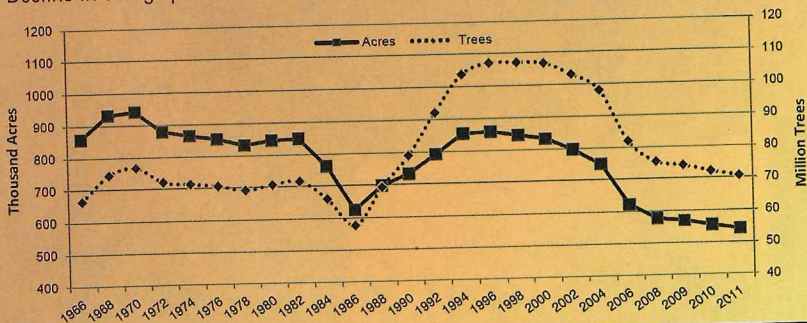
Looking forward, a troubling statistic is that 32,956 acres of oranges are listed as non-bearing acres in 2011. With an underlying annual loss rate of about 3%, the industry needs approximately 13,000 acres of new plantings to enter the bearing inventory each year. Since the non-bearing statistics contain three years of new plantings, 32,956 acres means there was a little less than 11,000 acres available to enter the bearing population for the 2011-2012 season.

In summary, there has been a substantial decline in Florida citrus acreage including oranges. While this decline has begun to stabilize, there are an insufficient number of non-bearing trees to sustain the current tree inventory. Hence, Florida orange production will continue to trend downwards. 

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Decline in orange production can be traced to the decline in orange-bearing acreage.



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