

# Why I turned to citrus for the IFAS research dean

By Jack Payne

**F**irst, the bad news: You've lost Dr. Jacqueline K. "Jackie" Burns as director of the Citrus Research and Education Center (CREC) in Lake Alfred.

Now the good news: She's the new dean of research for the University of Florida-IFAS. She'll call the shots on research priorities, sign off on hiring decisions and allocate resources to what she considers the most pressing research needs.

After 27 years in citrus as an administrator and researcher, Burns won't be going through any learning curve on how to serve the industry. She knows how absolutely essential it is that we find solutions to huanglongbing (HLB).

Her background in citrus was a key factor in my selecting her from a national pool of candidates. Burns is among a handful of the most knowledgeable people in Florida about the state of citrus research. Now, she'll be a 30-second walk from me as I prowl the halls of Manse McCarty (anyone who's been to the 58-year-old IFAS headquarters knows that's tongue-in-cheek) here in Gainesville.

What to do about citrus greening was very much on my mind when I chose a new dean for research. Of course, it's on my mind every single day as the administrative head of what I consider the world's foremost team of researchers investigating the disease.

Choosing Jackie Burns demonstrates the IFAS commitment to the citrus industry. I didn't want growers and association leaders to have to



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bring the new dean up to speed while the clock is ticking in the HLB fight. IFAS and the industry needed someone who knows who's doing what in the search for citrus greening solutions and where to get the resources to support that search.

We needed someone who already has established relationships with growers.

We needed someone who has the U.S. Department of Agriculture-APHIS, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Department of Citrus, the Citrus Research and Development Foundation and Florida Citrus Mutual on speed dial.

In short, we needed Jackie Burns.

CREC is among the world's largest public research facilities dedicated to a single commodity. Burns did a stellar job leading it. At the same time, during the past five years as executive director of the Citrus Research and Education Foundation, she oversaw the growth of its net worth from \$692,000 to \$1.25 million.

She has 89 research publications to her name, too — nearly all of them having to do with citrus.

So she knows good research when she sees it. Part of that is knowing what the growers need. She's fond of

repeating what a grower once told her — that he likes funding research, but he wants to make sure it ends up on the back of his tractor.

As dean, she'll run an operation that brought in more than \$100 million in research grants last year. Her staff will include nearly 500 faculty with research appointments.

She'll be responsible for facilities here in Gainesville, at 12 research and education centers around the state, and at four research and demonstration sites.

Michael Rogers, an entomologist at the center, will run CREC while I search for a permanent successor to Jackie Burns. Rogers has been at CREC for 10 years. He's the lead on citrus health management areas (CHMAs), which organize growers to coordinate

psyllid management activities such as spraying. We started with seven in 2011 and already have 52 statewide that cover 486,000 acres of citrus.

During the same period, the psyllid population has declined by 60 percent.

Rogers will continue to manage the CHMA program and his research on psyllid feeding behavior while he serves as interim director of CREC.

IFAS research covers a great deal more than citrus greening. However, no other disease represents such a threat to Florida agriculture as HLB. We have to strike a balance between the bold experimentation necessary to make breakthrough discoveries and research focused on more incremental but immediate advances that we can put on the backs of your tractors right now.

Jackie Burns is experienced at walking that line, and I'm confident that she's the right choice for citrus today, for citrus's future, and to lead the IFAS research enterprise for all commodities and natural resources important to Florida's economy.

Jack Payne is the University of Florida's senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources and the administrative head of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS). 🍊



Rogers

**DR. JACKIE BURNS**

- DIRECTOR**  
Citrus Research and Education Center, 2009–2014
- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Citrus Research and Education Foundation, Inc., 2009–2014
- 27 YEARS**  
in citrus research at IFAS
- 89** research publications