



# Help maintain research groves

By Jack Payne, jackpayne@ufl.edu, @JackPayneIFAS

**C**itrus greening is attacking the very research being done to come up with solutions. You see, HLB doesn't distinguish between commercial groves and research groves. It's an equal-opportunity disease. Just as HLB has driven production costs up for you, it's driven them up for the Citrus Research and Education Center (CREC) in Lake Alfred, too — almost to the point of bankrupting the foundation that supports our experimental groves.

We can't let that happen. CREC research groves are where:

- the development of all our new citrus varieties begins;
- we test insecticide and fungicide compounds;

- we conduct insect, mite and pathogen trials so that they don't have to be done in your groves, and growers don't have to risk damage to their trees.

Once upon a time, selling fruit from the research groves covered the cost of managing them. No more. Our research groves were \$200,000 in the red last year. CREC Interim Director Michael Rogers projected a \$440,000 loss this fiscal year to maintain 500 acres of groves. He says that the Citrus Research Education Foundation, which funds grove management, will be bankrupt in a year if we continue on the current trajectory.

So the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) development

office is working with Rogers to launch the CREC Citrus Grove Endowment this summer. We need your support so we can continue to play a vital role in supporting the Florida citrus industry.

The answer to HLB is likely going to come out of the groves. The recently released LB 8-9 Sugar Belle variety, which is highly tolerant to greening, originated from a tree in the breeding program of a scientist who planted the first one in a UF/IFAS grove more than 30 years ago.

So please give a close look to the materials we'll be distributing that explain why we're launching the endowment, and how it will support the groves we're all looking toward as the site of a solution to our current crisis.

We know you're feeling pain, and have been for a decade now. The endowment will keep the research groves in business, and that's where the solution that keeps you in business is going to come from. We can't pull back on the throttle now.

The idea behind an endowment, of course, is that your gift can keep on giving. That will aid us in helping the industry address a constantly changing landscape. We face climate change, possible normalization of relations with Cuba, a shrinking water supply, a GMO debate in which activism still has the upper hand over science, and other major issues.

Please contact Carré Saunders, IFAS director of development, at (352) 392-5427, csaunders@ufl.edu, or Julie Conn, IFAS Development's director of corporate relations, at (352) 392-2099, jrconn@ufl.edu for more information or to get involved. 🍊

*Jack Payne is the University of Florida's senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources and leader of the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.*

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