



Agriculture needs more R&D

By Jack Payne

IFAS is asking for your help to make sure the Legislature knows it needs to invest in the future of Florida agriculture. We'll be requesting a \$5.5 million funding increase to our budget in the upcoming session.

We need more people to meet your growing needs — and to move faster on solutions for citrus greening. Helping sustain a \$9 billion industry in the face of the threat from HLB is certainly a compelling need for Florida.

We'll prioritize the new funding, sending it to the areas of greatest need. The funding would be spent on expertise — bringing in more researchers to tackle agriculture's most serious challenges and Extension agents who take those discoveries to your fields, pastures and groves.

Threats to the water supply. Pest invasions. The spread of disease. Fertilizer restrictions. Volatile

markets. The list of challenges to your ability to earn a livelihood from the land is growing.

But your research and development shop is not growing. In fact, IFAS is coming off of six years of declining or flat funding. We're down nearly 30 faculty and 300 staff from what the state provided for in 2008.

Agriculture's innovation deficit is even larger when you think about what could have been, given that respected academics now estimate a 20-fold return on investments in agriculture research.

We have 15 million contacts a year with Floridians. Yes, many of those are visits to our websites, but we do more than 300,000 field or office consultations, serve millions of attendees through group learning

events, receive patents and produce research and educational materials. And still, it's not enough.

We can't wait another six years for a solution for citrus greening. We have to continue creating popular sellers like the Tasti-Lee tomato. We need to diversify Florida's agriculture by helping create new industries like we did with blueberries.

There are a lot of new faces in Tallahassee and it is a real challenge and a continuous mission to bring our message to the state's policy makers.

Please contact your growers association or Mary Ann Gosa-Hooks (mgosa@ufl.edu), who leads our government relations efforts, to find out what you can do to make sure your lawmakers make adequate investments in the future of agriculture.

The successful campaign to get Congress to dedicate \$125 million in the Farm Bill to citrus research is an example of what we can achieve when we speak with a unified voice. We need to keep up the momentum, focusing next on Tallahassee to make sure we use

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every resource at our disposal to protect the future of citrus in Florida.

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