



# CHMAs: a communication success story

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Innovation can spread like wildfire through conversation. The people who deliver new ideas need to talk to the people who can benefit the most from them.

A case in point is citrus health management areas (CHMAs). Now that we have 55 of them, they look like an inevitability, a no-brainer that had to happen.

But we went from zero to 55 through a years-long conversation. It started with growers asking us at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) to help them establish CHMAs.

## MULTIPLE MODES OF COMMUNICATION

We didn't have to waste time establishing communication. It was already there:

- UF/IFAS Extension agents are in your groves, on the phone with you or peppering your inbox with responses.
- We run field days.
- We present and listen at the Citrus Expo and other industry gatherings.
- Your participation on advisory committees provides a regular forum for formal conversations.
- The board of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation is stocked with growers and industry reps with whom we discuss the research agenda.

When the calls for CHMAs started coming in, we set up meetings so we could provide you with step-by-step instructions on how to proceed. Together, we mapped out the details of how to get started and how to successfully run a CHMA, and you were on your way.

When citrus growers in Southwest Florida found themselves in a giant CHMA that made coordination difficult, they talked to us about it. And we helped reorganize the mega-CHMA into nine smaller ones to give those growers a better handle on coordinating spraying.

Today, just a little more than five years since the first CHMA was established, more than 90 percent of the state's commercial citrus acreage is in a CHMA. That's what I mean by spreading like wildfire.

## KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING

The business side of IFAS never forgets who the client is. We're here to serve, and we can only serve if we know what the client needs. That requires constant contact and conversation. That's what we strive for in extending so many invitations for input.

Good conversation leads to good science, too. Our impact will be limited if we just talk to ourselves. Good science operates on a feedback loop. It assures that we remain relevant and that we hear from you about what we can't necessarily see in the lab.

With CHMAs, once we heard about the grower interest, our strong communication helped us help you answer questions of when, where and how to establish them.

When the very concept of the innovation depends on cooperation, as a CHMA does, dialogue is particularly important. I'd say the rapid spread of CHMAs indicates that we've got a good thing going with growers as far as two-way communication.

However, if you don't agree, let's talk about it! That's why I'm in this space every month.

Don't get me wrong, this isn't an IFAS-only proposition. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture help the program succeed, too. But it's really driven by you, working together with us, that's made us so responsive.

I often describe IFAS as the discovery and innovation arm of Florida agriculture. That innovation rests on a tradition: talking with those we serve. 🍊

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