



# The most important citrus decision of the year

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**C**arson? Bush? Rubio? Clinton? Sanders? You've got an important vote this year on March 15. You've got another vote in February that will impact your lives and livelihood even more directly than the one you cast for president. Ballots will go out this month on whether to continue the 3-cents-per-box tax for citrus research funding.

Here are some things I hope you'll consider as you vote on an extension of the tax.

**Government money follows your money.** Citrus research has recently received millions in state and federal tax money, in part because you've got skin in the game.

You have solid leaders such as Florida Citrus Mutual CEO Mike Sparks and Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam advocating for government funding. They have been able to build a much stronger case in Tallahassee and Washington, where decision-makers are confronted with more worthy causes than they have the money to fund, because you've invested on your own and not waited for government to come to the rescue.

Your actions give force to your advocates' words. That you've been willing to take money from your profits — and perhaps lately even from your pockets — shows how much importance you place on research, especially HLB research.

In the past year, the industry achieved unprecedented government support for funding the search for a solution to greening. The state Legislature authorized \$8 million in the present fiscal year's budget for HLB research. The 2014 federal Farm Bill includes HLB-specific research and Extension funding for the first time — \$25 million per year for five years. It's hard to imagine that kind of support would

have occurred if you hadn't been able to show you'd already invested tens of millions of dollars in the cause.

**There's been so much progress.** I know there is frustration that a decade into the epidemic, there's no cure for HLB. But there has been remarkable discovery and outreach. The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) has helped develop industry-saving tools to manage the psyllid, such as citrus health management areas and chemical controls. Our breeders have created rootstocks that show promising signs of tolerance to HLB. Our Extension agents and researchers have helped you understand and implement irrigation and nutritional strategies that may not be a cure, but do extend the productive lives of your trees.

Research directed by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) and carried out largely (though not exclusively) by UF/IFAS has resulted in more discovery about HLB in the past decade than in 100 years of previous inquiry by the rest of the world. That there's still no silver bullet is not surprising. Science rarely produces instant Eureka-type solutions. Instead, it's painstakingly incremental. You build solutions brick by brick.

At UF/IFAS, these bricks now make an impressive edifice. Abandoning the box tax and CRDF now would leave it unfinished.

**You get to decide how it's spent.** The box tax is unlike other taxes. You have direct influence on how the money is used. Representatives of the citrus industry control a majority of the CRDF committee that establishes the research agenda of the foundation. Industry leaders such as Tom Jerkins, Rick Kress and Larry Black also hold 10 of the 13 seats on the CRDF board of directors. I bet you'd like the same control over how Tallahassee and Washington spend your tax dollars.

**CRDF is headquarters for solutions.** The box tax puts Florida public scientists to work on the problem. That means the labs, the groves and the experts are already in place. Your investment fuels research. You don't have to build the machine.

I know better than to tell you how to vote. In fact, one of the things I love about the citrus community is that it's populated by independent-minded folks who don't wait for assistance to tackle their own challenges. But I hope that you will vote, and keep in mind that the vote you cast may affect you far more directly than the one you cast in March. 🍊

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