



# Searching the soil for solutions

By Jack Payne, [jackpayne@ufl.edu](mailto:jackpayne@ufl.edu), @JackPayneIFAS

**A** new University of Florida soil scientist has gone to the ends of the earth in search of what's happening below the surface.

You think your crops grow under stressful conditions? Sarah Strauss once went to Antarctica to look for microbes in the "soil," which she says is actually more like gravel.

She's part of the new wave of dozens of scientists I'll be hiring this year to help Florida farmers solve problems. Thanks in part to the support of citrus industry leaders, the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) got the resources from the Florida Legislature to hire more faculty to make up for the toll the recession took on our budget.

Strauss began her position at the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center in Immokalee in May. She will likely do work on HLB and on any number of tree and vegetable crops.



Strauss

There are at least three reasons you should be as excited about this as I am, even if your grove is nowhere near Immokalee.

First, she brings expertise in soil microbiology, which she developed through research at University of California-Davis, and before that at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. She's a critical hire because she'll be the

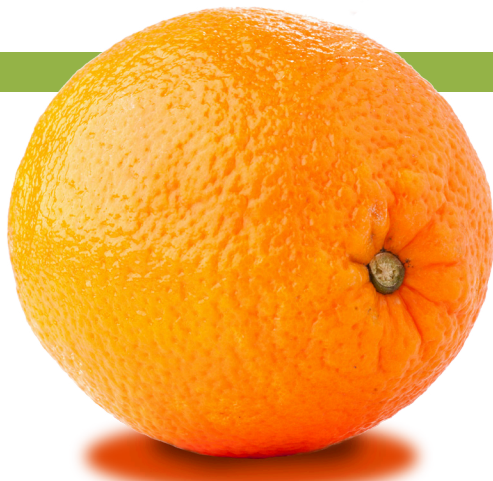
only soil microbiologist in Southwest Florida as Jim Graham retires from our Lake Alfred center within months of her arrival.

Second, she sees sharing what she knows as a core mission of her job, that discovery alone isn't enough. She's told us that one of the main reasons she's coming to UF is to help stakeholders. She also says what many of us at IFAS have been telling you for years — that Farm Bureau members and other clients sometimes come up with better research questions than we do. So she wants to hear from you, and she asked me to publish her e-mail address, [strauss@ufl.edu](mailto:strauss@ufl.edu). (We're still working on getting her a phone!)

Third, anyone who voluntarily goes to Antarctica can be counted on to do what it takes to find answers. It's that ends-of-the-earth commitment that tells me she'll be able to get to field days, groves and anywhere else she needs to be to help Florida agriculture thrive.

The resources from the 2015 state budget allow me to add dozens of Sarah Strausses to the ranks of my scientists in the coming year. That's why this year more than ever you'll hear me saying, "You can expect great things from IFAS." 🍊

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



## Coming Events

- ▶ **June 15–17** Florida Citrus Industry Annual Conference, Hyatt Regency Coconut Point, Bonita Springs; see [FLCitrusMutual.com](http://FLCitrusMutual.com)
- ▶ **July 12** Live Citrus Crop Forecast on [SoutheastAgNet.com](http://SoutheastAgNet.com) at noon
- ▶ **August 17–18** Citrus Expo, Lee Civic Center, North Fort Myers; see [CitrusExpo.net](http://CitrusExpo.net)