



'It's what we do'

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

Between the recent Olympics and football season, we're in that time of year when Gator athletics often overshadow University of Florida (UF) science.

Even when it's an agricultural event like the Gulf Citrus Growers Association Celebration in Fort Myers, UF President Kent Fuchs recognizes this, and he kicked off his keynote speech with an update on Gator medal winners in Rio.

President Fuchs said of our medal winners, "It's what we do."

Then he pivoted to the work of UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural

Sciences. He said: "I view citrus the same way. It's what we do. It's what we do as a state. It's what you do in one of our most iconic professions. And it's what we do at the University of Florida as one of our major research interests."

President Fuchs talked knowledgeably about citrus during the speech in August. That was almost beside the point. He made his most powerful statement just by coming down from Gainesville and spending the evening with Mike Sparks, Ron Hamel, Ben Hill Griffin III, Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, and a number of

Southwest Florida citrus growers.

He also made a very direct statement: "This evening, I reaffirm our commitment to you, and that we will work tirelessly on behalf of citrus, on behalf of all of Florida agriculture and the two million Floridians who make their living from the land."

A land-grant president indeed.

Whatever the obstacles to finding a scientific response to HLB, support from the university administration is not one of them.

You can read the full text of the president's speech here: <http://president.ufl.edu/updates/2016/08/citrus-is-what-we-do.html>

Fuchs runs an operation that educates a record 53,000 students this fall, includes a major medical center, and boasts an athletics program with dozens of national team championships (and for which he's searching for a new athletic director). UF is also preparing for a \$3 billion fund-raising campaign.

It's one of only six public, land-grant universities in the nation with colleges of agriculture, medicine, law and veterinary medicine — all on one campus. It's huge. You can imagine the competing demands for attention from a man in charge of all this.

We all worry about the future of the industry in these trying times. We don't have to worry whether citrus has the attention of the president who runs the university most likely to deliver solutions.

I'll end how President Fuchs ended: "Just like winning those beautiful, round gold medals in the Summer Games, I believe that working together, we'll ensure that Florida will always be the best place in the world to grow the best-tasting citrus in the world. It's what we do!" 🍊

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.



In attendance at the Gulf Citrus Growers Association Celebration were (left to right): Jack Payne, senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources, University of Florida (UF); Mike Sparks, executive vice president/CEO, Florida Citrus Mutual; U.S. Rep. Thomas Rooney; UF President Kent Fuchs; Florida Rep. Matt Caldwell and Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam.