



Raising researchers

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

The University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) isn't the only institution looking for a solution to HLB in Florida, but having us on the case bolsters the chance of success because of our land-grant university approach.

Christopher Vincent is an example of how important it is to have a land-grant university involved



Vincent

when the challenge is as immense as citrus greening. Teaching, research and Extension all have to be part of bringing the full strength of science to the response.

FROM STUDENT TO SCIENTIST

At UF/IFAS we do pretty well on the free-agent market finding talent for our citrus team. But Vincent demonstrates that we also have a heck

of a farm system for growing our own expertise. Our teaching produces some of our most promising experts.

Vincent comes to us from the Tropical Research and Education Center in Homestead, where he earned his doctorate studying the physiology of fruit crops.

His research is likely to focus on such things as how successfully citrus can be grown in the shade, and if he can identify a cash-producing crop to provide that shade.

You see, Vincent isn't just interested in finding a way for you to manage HLB. He wants to find a way you can do it affordably. So he hopes to work closely with one of our agricultural economists to create knowledge that incorporates both horticulture and economics.

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON SOLUTION-SEEKING

His academic lens also means he'll look at the problem differently than his colleagues, and that's a good thing. He sees HLB as a change to a tree's physiology as opposed to a disease. That kind of thinking is what leads him to wonder if a less thirsty tree would be one with higher HLB tolerance — hence shade as a possible solution.

Vincent also intends to carry

what he learns directly to growers. Extension is a vital part of his job. In fact, he was as interested in us as we were in him, in part because he wanted a job where his research could quickly be put into practice by growers.

And that was even before we told him that growers played a role in making his job possible. As he started work at the Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred, he came to know that citrus leaders helped UF/IFAS secure the state funding that allowed us to add his position and dozens of others dedicated to finding solutions to Florida agriculture's challenges.

I can't thank growers and citrus leaders enough for supporting our research and our funding requests.

My hope is that through hires like Vincent, we'll be able to thank you with more and improved ways of managing your groves so you can profit and thrive in the age of HLB.

Land-grant universities have the structure to play the long game in agriculture. Even if we solved HLB today, more challenges are sure to follow. So we're teaching future Christopher Vincents, providing them the tools and access to grant funding that fuels discovery, and inculcating them with an Extension ethic.

That's the three-pronged, land-grant mission at work, and what it means for you is solutions now and in the future. 🍊

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.