



Decades of delivering scientific solutions

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

Larry Duncan wasn't looking to become a leader in the citrus underground. But he's grown into the role in the past 32 years.

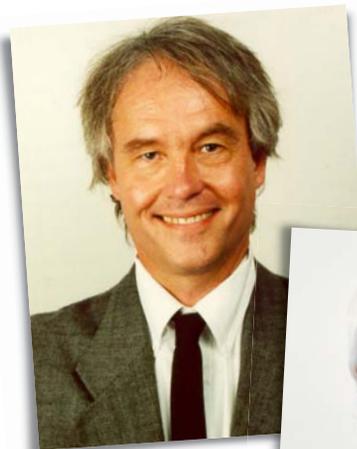
The Citrus Research and Education Center (CREC) in Lake Alfred has given him the time and place to develop from a nematologist into a *citrus* nematologist.

For 100 years, CREC has been turning scientists into citrus experts. The long history is important, because it takes time to grow a center from a single house to the world's largest research center dedicated to a single commodity. CREC today is a complex of labs, offices, the world's largest citrus library, a packinghouse, meeting space, and, of course, greenhouses and groves.

Duncan's career spans about a third of that history. He's one of a generation of five faculty who all have 30-plus years at Lake Alfred. That doesn't even include Harold Browning, another '80s-era alumnus who now runs the Citrus Research and Development Foundation from an office at CREC, and Jackie Burns, who spent 28 years at CREC before moving to Gainesville to become the IFAS dean for research.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

When Duncan was a young nematologist looking to come back to the United States from Senegal in the mid-1980s, he knew so little about University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences citrus research that he had assumed it was all done in Gainesville.



Duncan then (circa 1990) and now



Once in Lake Alfred, he discovered a big advantage of working at CREC. It put him on a team that comes at citrus from so many angles. With about two dozen active research programs, the scope of the opportunities for collaboration on citrus science that CREC offers would be difficult to find anywhere else in the world. When Duncan

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seeks expertise outside his discipline, he rarely has to look farther than down the hall.

Being at CREC also inserts him into a network across the state, and he has received valuable support from scientists with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and other institutions.

The other great advantage is that because CREC is such a hub for citrus research, it is a magnet for resources. From government grants to philanthropy to direct grower support, the center's 100-year record of solutions makes it the go-to place for continuing citrus research, Extension and teaching.

Its leaders, such as Burns and Browning before Michael Rogers, have routinely found promising scientists of all backgrounds from around the world, recruited them to a citrus all-star team in Lake Alfred, and helped that talent apply itself to improved varieties and management of citrus.

NEMATOLOGY ADVANCEMENTS

CREC's nematology research has been digging in the dirt for decades. In the 1950s, CREC scientists helped discover that the burrowing nematode

was the cause of spreading decline, the leading citrus disease threat of its day. Duncan's predecessors developed a control program for the burrowing nematode that many believe saved the industry in certain parts of the state.

Duncan's still going strong, and in fact has more graduate students working under him than at any point in his career. He continues to build on decades of work studying the ecology and taxonomy of nematodes to develop practical control measures that range from cultural practices, to new resistant rootstocks, to chemical nematicides.

He says CREC doesn't feel 100 years old at all. Sure, some of the gadgetry has changed. He didn't have a PCR machine in 1985. Nor did anyone else, for that matter.

But Duncan still goes out and takes soil samples and looks at them under a microscope. He has seen up-close how devastating HLB is if groves suffer additional damage to roots caused by Diaprepes root weevils. He continues his work in the lab and commercial groves, developing methods to use nematode pathogens of insects to control the citrus root weevil, in hopes of increasing grove survival and productivity.

SENIOR SCIENTISTS

Because history sticks around CREC in the form of emeritus faculty, Duncan may look like one of the faculty kids at the November celebration. Gene Albrigo, Ron Brlansky, Bill Castle, Jim Graham and Jim Syvertsen still show up regularly in Lake Alfred in their retirement.

And that's part of the key to the success of CREC. It has history in its buildings and its long list of innovations. Its history is also in its people, thanks to Duncan and his peers who keep building the citrus science that will inform the faculty who will be the old guard some day, when CREC celebrates its 125th anniversary. 🍊

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