



Citrus families are the heart of CREC

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

Jim Snively of Southern Gardens Citrus never met his great grandfather, known in the family as Pop John. But a century apart, they share a family tradition of connection to citrus science in Lake Alfred.

PIONEERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

In part because of Pop John's pioneering support for science with his fellow growers in Polk County, the citrus industry has overcome every challenge thrown at it for the past 100 years. That makes possible a livelihood in the citrus business in Clewiston for Snively and his family, who live in Lake Placid.

Great granddad was a key player in establishing what the great grandson knows as the Citrus Research and Education Center (CREC). Back in 1917, the University of Florida's (UF) experiment station was located entirely in Gainesville. Pop John and his colleagues did more than help UF expand citrus research. They helped create a new model of the off-campus research center.

The university's agricultural arm was still scattered among a college, an experiment station and the then-infant Cooperative Extension Service. Their unification under the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) was still 47 years away.

In 1917, Polk growers asked the Florida Legislature to authorize the



Two generations of Snivelys: Pop John (far left) and Jim

creation of the center in Lake Alfred. The lawmakers did so on the condition that the growers pay for it.

Legislators soon saw the value of public funding for the science there. So a three-way partnership that survives today developed among producers, government and the state's premier land-grant university.

So UF/IFAS doesn't advance citrus science by itself. Indeed, Southern Gardens has its own accomplished research arm. But Snively and Southern Gardens recognize that we need to pursue every possible path to make HLB history.

Snively devotes time to serve on the Research Management Committee of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation, a UF/IFAS support organization that channels federal funding into individual research projects to address growers' needs. He also plays a key role in the cooperation we get from

Southern Gardens for our plant breeders' field trials.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

It's part of Snively's commitment to his profession. It's also a family affair. CREC Director Michael Rogers is an Auburn graduate and knows Snively well enough to know that his wife is an Auburn alumna, too. So Rogers habitually greets Snively with "War Eagle!" Snively, a University of Alabama fan, responds, "Roll Tide!"

That they're both misguided in their athletic allegiance doesn't diminish the Snively-CREC connection, which exemplifies the multigenerational relationship between scientists and citrus families.

Generations of Snivelys and so many other Florida citrus families have recognized the value of CREC, and CREC scientists have in turn recognized the value of those families.

These families have supported UF/IFAS with box tax dollars, advocacy in Tallahassee for publicly funded science, and feedback to our researchers and Extension agents that keeps the science focused on solutions to producers' challenges.

It all helps answer a single question: How do we keep families in citrus for generations to come?

CITRUS CELEBRATION

We're celebrating that never-ending quest this year with CREC's 100th anniversary. There will be a field day and luncheon celebration on November 29. One hundred is just a number, but it prompts the reflection that this enterprise didn't start with us, and it won't end with us.

Please help us celebrate by attending the event, by continuing to support science, and by telling people that the industry, its families, government agencies and the land-grant university all contribute to citrus standing the test of time.

In a way, everyone involved in research is a pioneer. You undertake projects specifically because you don't know how they'll turn out. You're trying to push past the frontier of what is known. And we clearly need to do that right now.

The citrus industry of 2117 will benefit from the dedication of today's CREC scientists and Jim Snively, just as what we have now is built on previous generations of researchers and of Snivelys. The industry will still have a whole host of challenges to address unless agriculture suddenly becomes easier than it's been these last 10,000 years.

We're living very much in the moment during the HLB crisis. A 100th anniversary reminds us that we've faced obstacles together before. Because this partnership outlives us all, our relationship with the state's great citrus families is part of what a centennial is all about. 🍊

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.

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