



# Increased options for replanting

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

**T**oo many of you undoubtedly face the tough decision of *whether* to replant. I hope you'll stay in the business, but only you can figure out what's best for you.

Where the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) can help is in figuring out *what* to replant.

## BREEDING FORESIGHT

That's because we've been preparing for this unforeseen moment for decades. For example, Fred Gmitter didn't develop the Sugar Belle® mandarin as a way for you to recover from Hurricane Irma, but that's the way it's turning out.

*Had Irma hit five years ago, you wouldn't have had the choices you have now.*

Gmitter and Jude Grosser were UF/IFAS faculty upstarts in the 1980s when they resurrected a citrus breeding program at the Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred. No one asked them to. In fact, few people had much interest in it.

Those were the halcyon days when a grower could, as Grosser joked recently, just spray three times a year and pick up a check. The existing varieties were working just fine.

We know it was never that easy, but it took people with the long-term vision of Grosser and Gmitter to undertake scientific inquiry that might take decades to reach the grove. That's how long it took to develop a new citrus variety back then.

That three-decade head start is paying off right when you need it. Even before Irma, an IFAS/Florida Department of Citrus study estimated it would take five million new trees per year for 10 years to get Florida back to producing 100 million boxes of oranges annually.

Grosser and Gmitter's foresight means you have more and better choices than ever. Sugar Belle® shows promising results in standing up to HLB, for example. OLL-8 and OLL-4 sweet oranges have also been popular choices. A visit to the Florida Foundation Seed Producers website (<http://www.ffsp.net/varieties/citrus/>) or an e-mail to beutt@ffsp.net can give you the full rundown, but you can always reach out to Gmitter (fgmitter@ufl.edu) and Grosser (jgrosser@ufl.edu) as well.

## OTHER OPTIONS

Lest this sound like a sales pitch, the U.S. Department of Agriculture deserves credit for its breeding program as well. It has a number of citrus varieties available. Peter Chaires of the New Varieties Development and

Management Corporation (pchaires@nvdmc.org) can help you navigate those choices.

Had Irma hit five years ago, you wouldn't have had the choices you have now. Gmitter and Grosser have really hit their stride after building up a "library" of genetic choices, borrowing from that library to slowly create varieties through conventional breeding, and in recent years, using the tools of biotechnology to accelerate that search for 21<sup>st</sup> century trees.

That's why UF/IFAS is ready with a response for those who have the fortitude to pick themselves up yet again and stay in the citrus business.

Gmitter in particular knows that long-term, incremental progress toward better varieties is crucial to facing whatever challenge comes, whether it's an insect or a storm. How long-term? The remarks Gmitter prepared for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of CREC cover a sweep of 8 million years of citrus!

I know one grower who's looking at Sugar Belle® very closely. So do you. Michael Rogers, CREC's director, needs to replant at a UF/IFAS grove in Lake Placid that was devastated by Irma. He hasn't decided on varieties yet, but like you, he has more choices. 🍊

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



**Sugar Belle®**, developed by University of Florida breeders, shows tolerance to HLB.