



HLB continues to be the top research priority for Citrus Research and Education Center faculty.

# Current challenges to Florida citrus

By Tom Nordlie

**W**hat are the current challenges to Florida's citrus industry?

To a casual observer, the answer is simple – “HLB and more HLB.”

But for Michael Rogers, director of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Citrus Research and Education Center (CREC) in Lake Alfred, the answer is, “HLB and more.” CREC personnel monitor virtually every aspect of Florida citrus production and are prepared to address emergent situations at any time. As Rogers explains below, very little escapes their notice.

**Q: What do you see as the biggest challenges facing Florida's citrus industry right now?**

**A:** HLB will continue to be our top priority until it's solved, absolutely. We could probably spend the rest of the afternoon talking about CREC's work in that area. But this is a huge industry, and there are many other concerns. We have a great relationship with growers and they let us know what their concerns are, what they see in the groves, so that we can tackle their problems or benefit from their observations.



This orange displays citrus black spot symptoms.

**Q: Besides HLB, what diseases are high priorities right now?**

**A:** Citrus canker is still very important. Even though you don't hear so much about it these days, it's now considered to be permanently established in Florida, so it shouldn't be overlooked.

Another disease that's been kind of under the radar is citrus blight, which has been around for many years. Its cause has not been determined, but it's a decline disease and seems to be widespread around the globe. We are making progress toward identifying the cause, and once we have that information, it'll be much easier to develop management recommendations.

Citrus black spot emerged recently in Florida; it was first detected in 2010. So far, it's been isolated to parts of Collier, Hendry and Polk counties, but it will eventually make its way to other parts of the state. This is a high priority because there's an export issue involved. Some countries won't accept citrus from areas where citrus black spot is known to be a problem.

**Q: How about the availability of water for irrigation?**

**A:** Water use will continue to be an issue. Citrus groves need a lot of water,

and Florida's population is growing. So there's more demand for the water resources we have. For CREC, this has translated into a lot of work on water-use efficiency and using fertilizer efficiently.



**As Florida's population climbs, rural/urban interface becomes a challenge for more citrus growers.**

**Q: Are there any new regulatory issues that affect CREC?**

**A:** Yes, the Food Safety Modernization Act, FSMA. It's a whole body of federal law that updates our nation's food safety standards. It was signed into law in 2011. There are a lot of changes wrought by FSMA, and it has required many of our growers to make changes in the way they do things. At CREC, we've been active in helping growers take the steps required to be in compliance with the law.

**Q: Anything else?**

**A:** Another issue that we see now, and it isn't going to go away, is urbanization. How do we farm citrus while housing developments become part of the landscape? How can citrus growers be good neighbors, but at the same time continue to work their groves and stay in business?

This is a challenge that's a bit different from dealing with freezes or droughts, because here we're talking about the effects, or the perceived effects, of citrus farming on other people. CREC is a leader in dealing with this issue because so much former citrus land has been converted to housing. We want to create allies and supporters among our new neighbors. 🍊

# New Happenings at CRDF

*By Harold Browning*



The August board meeting of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) provided several updates that should be shared with the industry and other readers.

**The CRDF/Bayer CropScience partnership** announced on August 16 at Citrus Expo moves CRDF one step closer to having strong partners to develop and deliver novel solutions to HLB. This partnership represents over one year of interaction and planning, and brings one of the world's leading agricultural innovation companies into the foreground as Florida growers struggle to preserve tree health and sustain productivity.

Further details of the CRDF/Bayer CropScience partnership were presented at the October CRDF board meeting. These details on the coordinated effort to provide therapies to existing citrus groves are being provided to the industry through various communications.

**The CRDF board** is composed of 13 members representing the Florida citrus industry, two representing the University of Florida and one member representing the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Board terms reflect eligibility to complete two, 3-year consecutive terms. Some founding members were appointed to staggered 1- or 2-year initial terms. At the close of 2017, the first large-scale rotation of industry representatives to CRDF will occur, when three board members will complete their terms. These members are Tom Jerkins, president; Hugh Thompson, treasurer and chair of CRDF's Finance and Audit Committee; and Wayne Simmons, chair of the Industry Research Coordinating Committee. All three of these gentlemen have provided committed leadership to CRDF and have advanced the goals of the foundation through their representation and leadership.

Replacement board members have been appointed by the Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC) and Florida Citrus Mutual. John Updike, a Central Florida grower, was named by FDOC to replace Hugh Thompson, while Charlie Lykes of Lykes Brothers and David Howard from Graves Brothers Citrus were named as new board appointees by Florida Citrus Mutual to fill vacancies created by Tom Jerkins and Wayne Simmons. The new board appointments become effective at the CRDF annual board meeting.

Finally, CRDF has hired Lisa Weaver, **senior program manager**, to provide leadership and coordination of the technical aspects of the CRDF portfolio. As the complexity of the science has increased and the pressure to deliver short-term solutions is ever-present, the commitment to ensure that all areas of pursuit to HLB solutions are on track and on time is essential.

A plant biochemist, Weaver joined CRDF in early September. Her background in private industry project management and experience with agricultural technology brings new skills to the organization. Weaver has assumed responsibilities for program management, including managing the current portfolio and solicitation of new projects to fill gaps identified in the National Academy of Science's HLB review that is nearing completion. This move by CRDF refocuses program management formerly provided by Tom Turpen, and will emphasize moving emerging solutions to the field as quickly as possible. You will be hearing more about Weaver.

*Harold Browning is Chief Operations Officer of CRDF. The foundation is charged with funding citrus research and getting the results of that research to use in the grove.*



Column sponsored by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation