



# Safeguarding citrus exports

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**M**ark Ritenour discovered early in his career that what happens in the groves of the Indian River area needed to be linked to what happens in Japan, Canada, Korea and Europe.

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) has a multitude of scientists focused on growing fruit in Florida. Ritenour is the expert singularly focused on delivering top-quality fresh citrus to markets around the world after it's picked. In the past 20 years, Ritenour has made it his job to figure out how well Florida citrus travels.

Peter Chaires of the Florida Citrus Packers calls Ritenour *the* "go-to" guy on postharvest citrus science and the authority on the packinghouse and the port. It's why UF/IFAS citrus breeder Fred Gmitter says, "Mark's the man, no other options," for evaluating how well new varieties will withstand the journey from grove to grocery store.

Ritenour's boss at the Indian River Research and Education Center (IRREC) in Fort Pierce nominated Ritenour for one of the IFAS employee-of-the-year awards. It's no small honor in an organization of thousands of people. IRREC Director Ron Cave wrote that Ritenour's work is so highly valued that industry leaders will not seriously consider a new postharvest technology or fresh citrus



Ritenour

variety without his endorsement.

UF/IFAS continues to find solutions by developing its knowledge of industry challenges. With such a large team of experts, each scientist is free to specialize where he or she sees the greatest industry need.

Ritenour's evolution from teacher to statewide Extension postharvest citrus specialist is possible because UF/IFAS simultaneously carries out the land-grant missions of teaching, research and Extension. Ritenour petitioned for a change to his job description so he could do the job where he could do the greatest good for the industry.

## REGULATION WATCHDOG

Citrus, like almost every other industry, is a global business. Ritenour takes an orange and holds it up for scrutiny before the buyer does. He's your early detection system. Growers and packers can ask Ritenour first, or they can cross their fingers and hope to not get a call from Europe that a shipment of fruit is being turned away from port to rot at sea because it contained a certain chemical residue not allowed in that particular market.

Most nations establish their own standards for how much and what type of chemical residues are allowed on imported fruit. So Ritenour scours regulations worldwide and presents them to the Florida citrus industry on a frequently updated website (<http://irrec.ifas.ufl.edu/postharvest/index/pesticides.shtml>).

## PRICELESS ADVICE

Ritenour's work translates to big savings for producers.

One packer estimated that Ritenour has saved his company more than \$1 million with advice on how to improve fruit color before shipping. Other industry officials estimate that the value of the training Ritenour and his team of Extension colleagues provided for packinghouse workers in a recent fiscal year exceeds \$200,000.

It's impossible to put a price on Ritenour's discovery of what to do postharvest to prevent decay, peel breakdown and even *E. coli* contamination.

As a scientist, Ritenour is driven by curiosity to know more and to share it with people who can make use of what he discovers. As a man, he is driven by sympathy for his friends who have lost jobs as packinghouses close.

The scientist sees opportunity for discovery in confronting the continuing challenges of the industry. The man sees his own future as tied to that of the packers and shippers he serves. And he believes it's a long future indeed. 🍊

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