



Fine-tuning fertilization

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

Tripti Vashisth wants you to let your trees do the talking. She'll interpret. Vashisth has packed, toted, explained and delivered citrus nutrition boxes to 300 of you across the state. The boxes come with leaf and soil sample testing kits and self-addressed envelopes to send them to the lab.

PERSONALIZED SERVICE

She and her colleague Davie Kadyampakeni at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Citrus Research and Education Center will analyze the lab results. With the help of UF/IFAS Extension agents, they'll let you know how you can do an even better job feeding your trees. It's no form letter. It's a personalized analysis of what's happening in your grove.

We are charging our standard fee: \$0. That personalized attention and that price isn't new, but the box is.

GROWER OUTREACH

UF/IFAS Extension is always looking for a new way to share science with you. Vashisth, a state Extension horticulture specialist and assistant professor, has never waited for you to come to her.

She was at the UF/IFAS Extension booth at the Citrus Expo in Fort Myers for two days. She personally delivered citrus boxes and distributed them to growers in Immokalee, Fort Pierce and Lake Alfred in October. At a recent Highlands County meeting, she spent the entire lunch answering questions from a single grower about manipulating flowering.

In this space, I've told you the story of agents like Mongi Zekri, who rapidly



Photo by T. Weeks, UF/IFAS CREC

Free kits containing nutrition sampling materials were distributed to Florida citrus growers.

replies to your emails even during his yearly visit to Tunisia. Or Chris Oswalt visiting your groves to confer about how to prepare when there's a freeze in the forecast. Or Laurie Hurner, a second-generation citrus agent who may have been one of the first people who showed up at your grove after a hurricane to help you document damage.

Vashisth has been able to figure out what's useful to you because she asked. Two years ago, she did a survey of growers who reported they were in the black (really, it was a statistically significant number!) to find out what they were doing right. A tailored nutrition program emerged as a common strategy.

FINDING WHAT WORKS

Anyone can do it with the right leaf and soil sampling, Vashisth said. She hopes the next year of free testing and analysis that she, Kadyampakeni and half a dozen citrus Extension agents will be doing will form habits that

continue in the years to come.

It's an example of Extension extending just a little further.

One thing we've relearned in the era of HLB is that your grove isn't quite like anyone else's. What works on the Ridge won't work on the River. That's true of fertilization. In fact, Vashisth has three years of data that tell her the best-performing fertilizer in Central Florida is the second-worst one in Southwest Florida.

Our agents help you identify what works for you. They can link you to the updated Citrus Production Guide or even get you a hard copy. While our researchers continue with discovery, our Extension faculty continue to help you keep your trees alive. 🍊

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.