



Immersed in citrus

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

We call Amir Rezazadeh a fruit agent, but we all know what fruit means in St. Lucie and Indian River counties: grapefruit. And growing grapefruit means dealing with HLB.

Rezazadeh spends most of his time on citrus. The remainder he spends on ... citrus. That is, he works with alternative fruit crops as a possible plan B for citrus growers. So, he's essentially serving citrus 100 percent of the time.

BALANCED BACKGROUND

He's a horticulturalist by training. He has the academic background in how to manage groves. He also has the commercial background, having managed a grove in Iran for five years.

Some of the biggest University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) breakthroughs on HLB have been in how nutrition, fertilization and irrigation can keep your trees alive and productive. So Rezazadeh is a good match for the science he delivers.

Equally important is that he's a UF/IFAS Extension agent by training. He did his doctoral work at Mississippi State under the tutelage of an Extension specialist. So Rezazadeh was shaped not only in the science of how to care for plants, but in the art of how to care for people. The reason he applied for the job of fruit and field crops agent here was the opportunity to get into groves and talk with the people still making it in citrus.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Horticulture has always been a social enterprise to Rezazadeh, not just an economic one. He grew up growing vegetables in a large backyard garden



Rezazadeh

with his siblings and parents. His boyhood hobby developed into his adult academic and professional passion.

Rezazadeh will strive to help you make money and seek money. He sees himself as a bridge to agencies and people that offer technical or financial assistance.

On the technical side, he's working with UF/IFAS faculty such as Sandra Guzman and Johnny Ferrarezi at the Indian River Research and Education Center, which is next door to where he works at the UF/IFAS Extension St. Lucie County office. He has also connected with his other neighbors — the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Horticultural Research Laboratory.

Beyond that, he'll continue to familiarize himself with cost-share programs offered by state agencies and other sources. After all, his job is to focus on opportunities as well as challenges.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

Rezazadeh is currently reviving and expanding a citrus advisory group. If he calls you, please accept

his invitation. If he doesn't, please call him at 772-462-1628 or email him at amir2558@ufl.edu and invite him to your grove. I expect Rezazadeh will become as much of a household name in Indian River as Popenoe, Hurner, Oswald or Zekri are in other citrus-growing regions.

UF/IFAS has more solutions than you probably realize. Those solutions may work differently in your grove than in others. Rezazadeh can help you navigate that.

That's why he is helping with initiatives like citrus nutrition boxes so you can do leaf and soil sampling. He'll be meeting with the entire team of UF/IFAS citrus agents to discuss how to turn sample lab results into practical recommendations for your grove.

That's right, personalized UF/IFAS science. That's why we have Extension in the first place. 🍊

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.