



Achieving more together

By Jack Payne, jackpayne@ufl.edu, [@JackPayneIFAS](https://twitter.com/JackPayneIFAS)

To my friends in the citrus industry, thank you. Together, we did in 10 years what the rest of the world didn't do in 100.

Starting with scant knowledge of HLB, we discovered a great deal about the bacteria, the psyllid, management techniques and the economics of production methods. Growers are applying this know-how and finding that it's keeping them in business.

We've zeroed in on nutrition and irrigation strategies that can keep HLB-infected trees alive, productive and profitable. We've made leaps forward in identifying genes that make citrus susceptible to HLB — or resistant to it.

PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

No other challenge has received the attention and resources that saving citrus has in my decade leading the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). I'm not satisfied, but I am gratified by the progress we've made together.

I say together because you have been our partner. Rob Atchley has allotted acreage on Duda property for UF/IFAS scientists to research propagation methods. Larry Black of Peace River Packing helped channel research dollars into the science with the most potential. Mike Sparks did so much to bring those dollars to Florida. Jeff Bass carried on the third generation of his family's support for citrus biotechnology.

Matt McLean invited me to his grove where he and his family made a pitch for more research on organic production while I ate some of the best oranges



Sparks (left) and Payne

I've ever tasted right off his trees. Over breakfast (which of course included OJ), Steve Smith gave me reports from the groves of Southwest Florida.

Frank Hunt paid elegant tribute to the industry at the 100th anniversary of the Citrus Research and Education Center (CREC). I got to know Ben Hill Griffin III, the man whose family name is on the Ben Hill Griffin Jr. Citrus Hall at CREC, where that anniversary celebration occurred.

I saw growers bring ideas to us, like when Tommy Thayer asked us to test a tree protection method. Based on the favorable results, that method is gaining in popularity.

The partnership comprises whole organizations, not just individuals. I'm thankful to the Citrus Research and Development Foundation, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Citrus Mutual, the Florida Fruit & Vegetable

Association and others for their cooperation and support.

For the past five years, I've had the privilege of this space in Citrus Industry magazine. Tacy Callies is a well-organized editor who keeps me adhering to deadlines. Publisher Robin Loftin has extended me the space to tell the UF/IFAS story and invitations to gatherings where I heard yours.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

I've also been keeping my eye on what I believe has the potential to be the single most effective solution to HLB. Nian Wang's use of gene editing developed a grapefruit tree resistant to canker. Now, in his lab and others at research and education centers across the state, we're aiming that tool squarely at HLB.

I believe one legacy of the coronavirus will be that it helped align public sentiment with an outlook the citrus industry has long held. We can improve lives and livelihoods with evidence-based practices. We can do this in agriculture through publicly supported research, teaching and Extension. We base this approach on our collective belief in the concept of expertise itself.

Although I didn't make it to a post-HLB promised land with you, I depart amidst a growing consensus that there is such a place. It will look different from what we live today, and it still may take some time.

But no matter how long I stayed at UF/IFAS, the job of serving citrus would never be done. Science proceeds incrementally. We are always getting better, learning more, sharing data and insights.

The future of citrus was made possible by the way we spent the past decade together confronting the greatest challenge the Florida citrus industry has ever experienced. It won't be me in the corner office anymore leading the discovery and innovation to get us to the future faster. But UF/IFAS will surely carry on the tradition of scientists and growers getting there together. 🍊

Jack Payne retires this month as the University of Florida's senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources and head of the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.