

# Resolved to give growers what they need



By Michael Rogers

January marks the season for resolutions: exercising more, eating well and being more organized. But in the research world, resolutions may not be that simple.

I don't think that University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) researchers could be any more "resolved" in finding ways to fight citrus diseases and ways to improve how citrus is grown in Florida.

But I do think we can use this opportunity to reflect on how we communicate about our research and engage with our partners across the state. Over the last 18 months, we all have learned how to work together over a Zoom link or from remote offices. And sometimes those methods are effective. But we've noticed as we start to offer more face-to-face seminars and meetings that our attendance has been lower than expected.

## SHARE YOUR IDEAS

It might be that some of the information is best delivered in an online format. Or perhaps we are not offering the information at the best time or a convenient location. Maybe we need to rethink the topics that we are offering or what information growers really want.

That's where we need your help.

Let me know what you want to hear about from our researchers and how you want to get that information. We've set up a special email account where you can let me know your ideas directly. Drop me a line at [Citrusgrowerconnection@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:Citrusgrowerconnection@ifas.ufl.edu). It's an account that goes directly to me and is dedicated to hearing from growers. Let me know what you think!

## RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The start of a new year is also a good time to review what the UF/IFAS research agenda is for the near future.

Of course, finding solutions to HLB remains the highest priority of our research teams. We have learned more about HLB in the last 10 years than in the previous 100 years that it has been known to scientists. Yet there are still questions and issues to resolve. Progress in root health, nutrition management and tolerant varieties has changed the situation. With this knowledge, Florida citrus growers are staying in business. Replanting and changing grove management practices are making an impact.

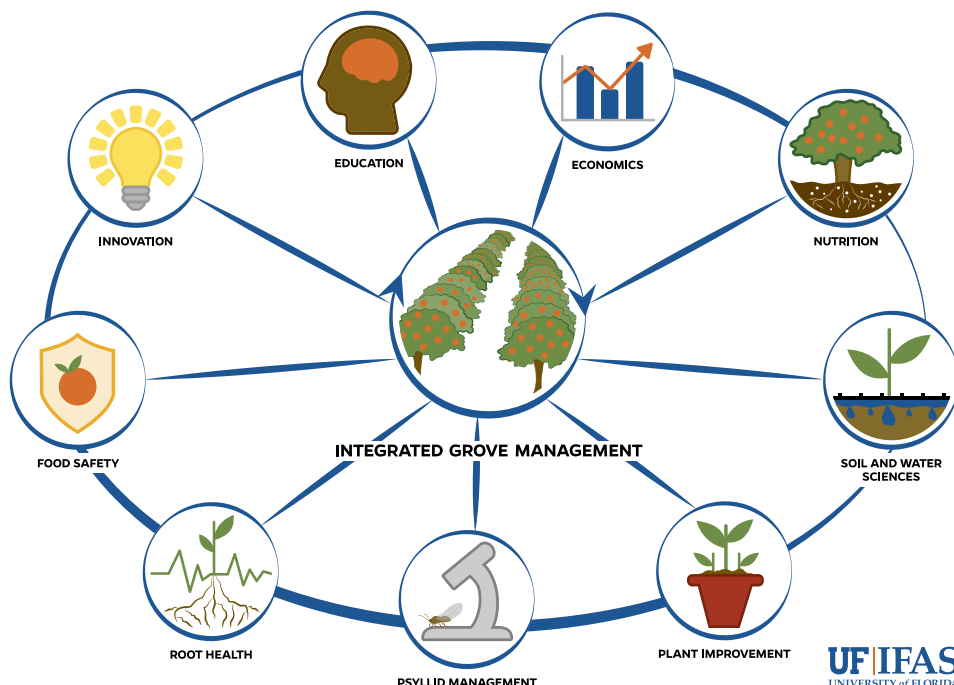
The research agenda at UF/IFAS is an integrated one that includes advancements in horticultural practices, plant physiological responses to disease, the biology of the pathogen, vector/pathogen interaction and epidemiology, citrus genetics and breeding, fruit quality and flavor, and economics of grove management.

As we look to a new year of research, our intention is to fund the right science that leads to innovations, like the proper use of gibberellic acid to increase yield, developing incompetent psyllids and improving the plant's defense responses to the pathogen.

## PROMISING PROJECTS

New in 2022, UF/IFAS researchers are part of two large, nationwide projects; one with University of California, Riverside (UCR) and

## UF/IFAS Statewide Citrus Research and Education Portfolio



one with Texas A&M University. Ute Albrecht and Zhanao Deng are collaborating with colleagues from UCR on evaluating the performance of 300 rootstock hybrids in established trials to map HLB tolerance and resistance characteristics that will ultimately lead to releases of superior rootstocks. Albrecht, Ariel Singerman and Choa El-Mohtar are working with colleagues from Texas A&M on advanced testing and commercialization of novel defense peptides and therapies for HLB control. Both projects recently received funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

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Another innovative research strategy is the work of Kirsten Pelz-Stelinski. Her lab is working on biological control-based tools for decreasing pathogen transmission. By introducing new DNA to a bacterium inside an insect host, called paratransgenesis, scientists can create an insect with new characteristics. The goal is to eliminate the psyllid's ability to transmit *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* (CLAs), the HLB bacterium. In the short term, this research will facilitate identification of the transmission processes that allow CLAs to move through the insect gut. Release and replacement of wild ACP populations with altered populations that are unable to deliver CLAs will be an additional tool for use in integrated disease management.

These are just a few of the exciting research studies underway in UF/IFAS labs that will eventually make their way into your groves. Stay tuned! 🍊

*Michael Rogers is the director of the UF/IFAS Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred.*



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