UF/IFAS CITRUS STATE

Top priority: Updating nutrient recommendations

By J. Scott Angle, jangle@ufl.edu, @IFAS_VP

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is committed to updating nutrient management recommendations for citrus. For the next two months, that means seeking state funding for the research.

The UF/IFAS team was crafting a specific proposal to the Legislature as of this writing. It's at the very top of our legislative agenda and the very top of our research agenda. You put it there.

Davie Kadyampakeni is among the researchers at the UF/IFAS Citrus Research and Education Center whose work has contributed to improvements in citrus nutrient management.

I heard from you at the Gulf Citrus Growers Association luncheon in June. You let me know at the Citrus Expo in August. It was the buzz when I visited with you at the Florida Citrus Mutual crop estimate luncheon in October. And it was on attendees' minds at the open house and field day at the Citrus Research and Education Center in November.

I listened. Now it's time to act. I plan to visit Tallahassee repeatedly to explain how important nutrient management research is for the future of the industry.

We can certainly make the case that this type of citrus science is overdue. One of the important advances by UF/IFAS scientists in the past decade is a deeper understanding that nutrition is one of the most effective tools in managing HLB. I know we can't continue with regulations that limit this tool's effectiveness.

REGULATION AND RESEARCH

The challenge is that regulation and research are in a race, and regulation is way ahead.

We need to catch up, and fast. We have a better chance of succeeding if we work together. I need your help letting our lawmakers know that it's in Florida's interest to keep citrus growers in business by updating the research on nutrient management so that we can protect both water quality and the economy built around citrus.

Somehow our recommendations have become regulation. If that's going to be the case, then we need up-to-date science that reflects today's conditions. We didn't even have some of the varieties you're growing today when we did the research that underpins current recommendations.

It all predates a changing climate, variable soil conditions and, of course, the most serious disease threat in the industry's long history. Few sectors can survive without innovation. We can't ask you to grow Bingo mandarins with decades-old Valencia science any more than we can ask you to build Teslas with Pinto technology.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

To help you, I need you to help UF/IFAS. Let your elected representative know you need updated citrus science. Let Matt Joyner know if you can go to Tallahassee to testify or to walk the halls of the Capitol to make the case. Heed the call of leaders like Steven Callaham, Ray Royce, Steve Smith, Larry Black and others when they talk about how you can help.

It will take producers, packers and processors with reports from the grove that remind legislators that they have the power to fund solutions to one of Florida agriculture's gravest challenges.

Reach out to your association representative, to me, or to our government relations people — Mary Ann Hooks (mahooks@ufl.edu) and Christopher Hodge (c.hodge@ufl.edu) to see how you can help us help you.

I hope to report to you later this year about the plans to undertake major new state-supported nutrient management research. I also hope I'll be thanking you for being persuasive enough to make it possible.

J. Scott Angle is the University of Florida's vice president for agriculture and natural resources and leader of UF/IFAS.