



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

A transformative program

Morgan McKenna always knew she'd return home some day. Three previous generations of McKennas hadn't just made a living from citrus. They'd made a life of it. It's a life she wanted, too.

Morgan saw the family business as family first and business second. She was most interested in the emotional rewards of coming home to be part of the operation, the chance to bond with her father and uncle running the business.

She had left for the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. That led to a job with Syngenta and moving away to California. She found a way back to Florida within the company. But homecoming was still some day.

PROVIDING A PATH

It was the UF/IFAS Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources that taught her that the time to pursue your passion is now, not some day. A fourth-generation citrus producer, she's back as an assistant production manager at McKenna Brothers, Inc.

When Ray Royce went through Wedgworth nearly a generation earlier, he decided he was right where he needed to be, leading a citrus association, but that he could serve his industry more effectively by reaching out beyond citrus.



Ray Royce

McKenna and Royce are among Florida citrus leaders who regard Wedgworth as transformative in the way it prepared them to be



Morgan McKenna leads a reflection activity with a Wedgworth classmate.

better servants to citrus.

The industry is flush with Wedgworth alumni: Former Florida Citrus Mutual Presidents Tom Mitchell and John Barben; Pam Fentress; Jim Snively; John and Mason Smoak; David, Mark and Wes Wheeler; Aaron Himrod; Callie Walker and Kate English; and Tom Kirschner are among those who have gone through the two-year program.

MAKING AN IMPACT

Wedgworth focused McKenna on where she could make the greatest impact right now. It convinced her that it was time to serve the industry while there was still an industry to serve, and while she still had mentors to help her learn what she'd need to know to lead the family business into its second century.

Her father and uncle would be able to pass along to McKenna the know-how they'd inherited and added to. She'd learn by their example what it takes to be a business and industry leader. And she'd get to partner with her cousin Emily McKenna so they'd be ready for the day when they take over for the brothers.

She also focused her volunteer

service on citrus, joining the Citrus Research and Development Foundation board. She's currently its vice president.

McKenna potentially has decades of service to the industry ahead of her. She is among the youngest Wedgworth participants in the program's 30-year history.

Royce was the second-oldest member of his class and already six years into the job he still has today, executive director of the Highlands County Citrus Growers Association.

Royce takes care of Lake Placid and Highlands County first. In fact, since Wedgworth, he has served as vice mayor of his city. He chairs the Highlands County Economic Development Commission. He's now 20 years into his job as association leader.

But Wedgworth expanded his we're-all-in-this-together outlook. By we, he means all sectors of agriculture. Royce has deep friendships with people in forestry, vegetables, cattle and nurseries. Royce has chaired both Wedgworth's alumni association and its advisory board.

While Wedgworth is not a prerequisite, six of his 14 board members are Wedgworth alumni.

BUILDING A BROADER VIEW

The national and international trips that were part of his Wedgworth experience, the constant contact with colleagues outside of citrus, and the Wedgworth emphasis on communicating with and understanding people with different perspectives have broadened Royce's view of the world.

In a world where a pest from abroad can devastate the industry, where you can learn from other nations about how they've addressed challenges to their citrus industries, and regulations in Europe can affect what you grow in Lake Placid, Royce — and Florida citrus — benefit from that broader view.

Wedgworth celebrates 30 years of programming this year.

Royce describes Wedgworth as a two-year program that has been changing his life for 15 years. He tells would-be Wedgworthers that participation, both in the programming and then as an active alumnus, is making a long-term investment in your development as a person and a leader.

It has helped Royce change his approach to problems. He complains less about them and focuses more on generating solutions.

Wedgworth celebrates 30 years of programming this year, and McKenna's Class XI graduates in July. Citrus has been represented in most classes going back at least to Fentress in 1994. Applications will open in late spring 2023. Contact Christy Chiarelli at ccw@ufl.edu for more information about the program.

Wedgworth can help, as it did for McKenna, bring you "home" to citrus. It can also, as it's done for Royce, take you far outside the industry while never forgetting your own grove and the need to lead for the good of your Florida citrus colleagues. 🍊

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

A Possible Game Changer and Other Projects



By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer

My deadline for submitting this column came just as the results of a grower referendum on whether to continue the mechanism of self-assessment that has provided much of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation's (CRDF) funding were announced. The results showed that 76% of the ballots returned were a "yes" in favor of continuing the order. I will address this in more detail in a subsequent column.

In last month's column, I wrote about injecting oxytetracycline (OTC). Why? Because it could be a real game changer if the research proves successful. OTC could increase production levels and fruit quality to align more closely with what we had before the precipitous decline caused by HLB. This is the only research that we have identified that could be a true game changer in the short run, and a game changer is what we most need.

Since that column appeared, Ute Albrecht, a plant physiologist with the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS), continues to test various OTC formulations and rates. Also, a company that will soon be submitting a Section 24(c) registration for its product has had further conversations with state regulators. I still believe it is possible for this to be approved by late summer or early fall.

CRDF recently attended a meeting with growers, regulators and researchers regarding the black spot program in Southwest Florida. This has been a terribly frustrating issue because the program does not seem to be anchored in science.

It is my sense that progress in finding a compromise that helps Florida growers without hurting those who export to Europe was made. CRDF will stay on this and do what it can to make sure the program is based on accurate science.

The final year of work on UF/IFAS entomologist Lauren Diepenbrock's mealybug project was approved, but not without a vigorous debate in meetings with the CRDF Research Management Committee and with the board. As one committee member said: "Our hair is on fire, and it's hard to spend money on something other than HLB right now." However, a funding compromise was reached between the committee meeting and the board meeting, so the board decided to accept the compromise and finish out the work, because there are many growers dealing with mealybug problems.

In addition, a project dealing with novel zinc products and advancements in work with brassinosteroids to increase yield and fruit quality was approved.

Two projects were deferred. One had to do with studies on products containing gibberellic acid, 2,4-D and cytokinin. The board thought more information from the researcher was needed. The second was a series of field trials involving injecting OTC. Since CRDF had already funded Albrecht to do this and because the companies have their own research underway to support their registration efforts, it was not clear what additional research would add. We did not kill the proposal but deferred it to see if a more productive role for our research dollars presented itself.



Column sponsored by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation