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All hands on deck for Florida citrus

My 89-year-old father-in-law has planted new trees in his California grove in the last two years. Bruce Kelsey believes in the future of citrus, and that reinforces my belief in the future of citrus.

I'm not saying everything Bruce does makes sense. I wish he didn't still go up on ladders and pick fruit, for example. But his determination to keep going exemplifies the spirit I see in Florida growers.

California hasn't been hit by HLB like Florida has, but I wouldn't want to depend on California's water supply either, going years without significant rainfall.

Bruce, like most Florida growers, is a lifelong learner. Last year, he attended the Citrus & Specialty Crop Expo. He sat with me in Tampa during the seminars, carefully listening to the latest on markets for ecosystems services, best management practices and crop insurance enhancements.

I couldn't help but be proud to show him what I believe to be the best team of university-based citrus researchers in the world, and to bring him by the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension booth on the trade show floor.

Again, he was teaching me a lesson just by being there with me. You never stop learning how to be a better citrus grower, even after a lifetime as a fifth-generation producer.

Bruce still asks me lots of question about citrus, too. I have just as many for him. We've swapped observations and questions during dashboard conversations while his Chevy tool truck bounces over ruts in his grove.

The fight against HLB is a scientific one, and it's my job to bring all UF/IFAS resources to the table. You have



Bruce Kelsey

my commitment that citrus continues to be a high priority for your land-grant university.

Being Bruce Kelsey's son-in-law makes citrus science personal for me. I can't tell you I favor citrus over cattle, forestry, vegetables or ornamentals, but I can tell you citrus is on my mind even when I'm on family time.

He's my father-in-law first. I'm fortunate to be married to a scientist who was raised in a citrus family and has contributed valuable insights as she and I have our own dashboard conversations, whether we're driving for work or on a leisure trip.

There is additional accountability, though, when your spouse's dad asks — whether at the dinner table or dashboard — what you're doing for the future of citrus. I tell him what I tell you: It's all hands on deck at UF/IFAS. 🍊

J. Scott Angle, senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources, is the leader of UF/IFAS.