

Citrus health management areas and citrus greening

By Dan Gunter



Growers will be hearing much more about the creation of citrus health management areas — the National Research Council's (NRC) number-one organizational recommendation for addressing citrus greening.

The management areas were identified by the NRC as a way for the industry to preserve significant acreage and slow the spread of HLB. They might also facilitate the adoption of new technology. The citrus health management areas are a high priority because of their potential for sustaining production until improved technology-based greening management approaches can be implemented.

The NRC recommends the ideal management area as 10,000 to 50,000 acres in which best management practices (BMPs) are coordinated. Significant advantages can also be achieved in areas with much smaller acreage, for example, in the area of psyllid control.

The Citrus Research and Development Foundation's Board of Directors, in considering the NRC recommendations, recognized that forming citrus health management areas must be voluntary. Each management area must be created as a result of neighboring growers working together to combat greening. Growers in a management area will decide what management practices to adopt, based in part on the severity of greening in their specific area. Area growers will also decide how to best coordinate their activities.

The CRDF Board created a subcommittee to oversee a program to help growers who want to voluntarily create a citrus health management area. The subcommittee will consider how best to work with voluntary grower groups. One idea is to establish an expert team that will work with the growers, local Extension agents and regional grower associations to provide technical help. That help could come in the areas of mapping, pest management and horticultural practices, coordination of management practices and field trials of new disease-control strategies.

Details of the citrus health management area program are currently being developed. Faculty at the University of Florida will be presenting recommendations to the CRDF subcommittee on how the team could help growers.

Agreeing to a management area is a difficult first step. Coordination of management practices in a management area is even more difficult. However, the National Research Council believes that the citrus health management area is the single most important of the 23 recommendations in its report. The CRDF Board adopted all 23 recommendations in the NRC report and recognized that many of the recommendations support the research and other activities already in place.

The CRDF plan of work got more complex with receipt of the NRC recommendations and the board's decision to do what it can to encourage growers to create citrus health management areas. The subcommittee will be working on many different fronts to find ways to provide growers with support as they consider the NRC recommendation.

While the industry is evaluating the possibilities of creating management areas, the CRDF Board continues working with the research community to find new technologies for management of the Asian citrus psyllid and greening. Creation of the citrus health management areas will improve the chances for successful introduction of new solutions in the future.

Dan Gunter is the Chief Operating Officer of the Citrus Research and Development Foundation. The foundation is charged with funding citrus research and getting the results of that research to use in the grove.

