



Spring 2015



Photo Courtesy of Duda

“Gulf” Growers Replant & Plan for the Future

Although the dreaded bacterial disease citrus “greening” is having major economic impact on “Gulf” growers...growers in this region are finding new ways to manage their groves to deal with it! Without doubt, producing citrus in the current era of “greening” has become the toughest challenge growers throughout the state have ever faced. Yet, despite the pressures and challenges of HLB...growers in SW Florida are expressing “optimism” through proactive grove management and the resetting and replanting of thousands of citrus trees in the 5-county region.

Recent interviews with some of the top grove managers and industry leaders provide insight into the “positive” future of citrus production in the “Gulf” region.

“Despite higher production costs due to ‘greening’, citrus growers here are still making a profit,” said Dr. Mongi Zekri, UF/IFAS multi-county citrus agent for the SW Florida region. “Most citrus groves in the ‘Gulf’ area are still producing good crops of good quality fruit,” he added. Dr. Zekri noted that growers here are optimistic and are not giving up! “They are resetting their groves and replanting new solid blocks. I hear there is more demand and requests for new young trees than what nurseries can produce and deliver.”

Nursery owner Phil Rucks agrees with Dr. Zekri. “Currently, we are growing between 300-400,000 citrus nursery trees annually for planting in the ‘Gulf’ production region! That number has increased 25% in the past year due to new plantings in SW Florida,” said Rucks. He

attributes this demand to the fact that, overall, the region has better soil properties to maintain water and nutritional holding capacity for growing healthier trees in the midst of HLB. He added, “Overall, the well-maintained groves in the region appear to have adapted to HLB by improving tree health and productivity. The region’s quick response to organizing control measures against the psyllid populations has resulted in manageable HLB incidence.”

At DUDA, the “citrus team” initiated one of the Florida’s largest replanting operations. “Our expansion of about 3000 acres was done in conjunction with the Coca-Cola planting initiative,” explained Rob Atchley, DUDA’s general manager of citrus groves. “Our team felt the deal provided an excellent opportunity...and the driving force...to replant some of our vacant grove land to increase the efficiency of our operations and keep them viable for the long run. We believe in the viability of the Florida citrus industry, and feel that although it is a very challenging business...it is a very good business.”

Sam Jones, senior manager of domestic citrus operations for Duda Farm Fresh Foods, emphasized that the “young” team at DUDA is committed to growing citrus profitably and sees a future in it. “The ‘citrus team’ that Rob and I have in place here in LaBelle...is made up of some of the best people in the industry. We work as a ‘team’ and consider the challenges a ‘team battle’. We are excited about our new plantings, including new mandarin variety trials.

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President's Message

It has now been almost 10 years since citrus greening was first discovered in a commercial grove in Hendry County. Although our industry has "survived" for 10 years in spite of the initial scientific predictions of "gloom and doom"...most citrus growers realize that we are a long way from winning the war against HLB!

So far from my perspective, the spring of 2015 can be labeled "The Spring of Discontent." Poor tree health, leaf loss, and an erratic bloom have been real challenges for citrus growers! Additionally, the issues of no "cash" fruit market, and other market maneuvering of mostly seasonal price averages...are leaving many growers uneasy about the prospects of the coming season. Although optimism remains high for new rootstocks, varieties and plantings...growers are justifiably concerned about "pricing," as well as the narrowing of future fruit price margins. Seemingly, growers just want to finish the 2015 harvest season...and look forward to the 2016 crop.

All segments of the industry are being pressured by HLB and its impacts on costs, production, processing and marketing of orange juice. We as an industry must work together in order to solve the complexity of greening issues, while remaining committed to making "Florida" orange juice the "first" choice of consumers throughout the world.

Although Florida citrus growers are facing unprecedented challenges, their "optimism" remains high! It is encouraging to witness "replanting" and "resetting" of citrus groves here in the "Gulf" region, as well as other parts of the state! New plantings are also dotting the landscape, and



Wayne Simmons

committed growers are "resetting" mature groves. In order for us to increase demand for our orange juice, we must have stable prices at the consumer-level, which means we must bring fruit production back to pre-greening levels! The USDA's new citrus tree assistance program (TAP), and increasing tree availability are helping growers make those tough decisions to replant. And, if in the near future, growers can gain federal tax relief to immediately expense the costs of acquiring, planting, cultivating, maintaining and developing a citrus grove and the associated costs, more trees will certainly be put in the ground!

As the Gulf Citrus Growers Association transitions into the next 25 years, we will look different than we did the first 25 years. Life changes and the coming generation of leadership will take over. We, as an association, are planning for that transition by taking steps to remain in a financially-sound and strong position. As Florida's entire citrus industry goes through "a make-over," GCGA will also change! But,

GCGA Schedules 29th Annual Meeting

The Gulf Citrus Growers Association's board of directors has scheduled the organization's 29th annual meeting for Wednesday, June 3, 2015. The annual business meeting and member luncheon will be held at the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center (SWFREC), University of Florida/IFAS in Immokalee.

The annual "business session" will begin at 10:30 a.m. and will feature updates from the association's leaders based on the issues and activities that the association has focused on during the past year.

Association members will be receiving invitation letters to the 29th annual meeting, along with RSVP cards for the annual luncheon. There is no charge for the luncheon, but **members must register** by

RSVP card, or by calling (239) 690-0281 **prior to May 29th.**

The 2015-2016 GCGA board of directors and association officers will be "officially seated" at the annual meeting, and the association will recognize leaders and members for their support of the organization.

This year's annual luncheon speaker will be Michael W. Sparks, executive vice president/CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual. Sparks will present updates on the state and federal initiatives which FCM is implementing on behalf of Florida's citrus growers.

The Gulf Citrus Growers Association's Scholarship Foundation will hold its annual meeting on June 3rd in conjunction with GCGA's session. Reports from the foundation's leaders will be presented.

with that said, the relationships formed and the local issues addressed will continue. "Gulf Citrus" has been our region's "voice" for citrus and agriculture on many fronts. Your leadership's intent is to continue to do what your local organization does best ... represent you and your business on the key issues!

I would like to thank everyone who participated in and supported our annual Gulf Citrus "Country GALA." This event continues to be the premier fund-raising event for the association. I would like to thank Ron and Bernadette for their tireless efforts in making it such a success!

I would also like to thank all the "volunteer" leaders, who give their time and talents to make GCGA successful. Without your help, support and commitment...the association would not exist. Finally, "thank you" GCGA members for allowing me to serve as your president. It is an honor and a privilege to represent you and our "Gulf Citrus" industry.



Gulf Citrus Growers Association 2014-2015 Board of Directors

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Bob Newsome, Secretary
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Ron Mahan

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Bryan Paul

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Danny Sutton

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GCGA Schedules Elections for 2015-16 Board Members

The Gulf Citrus Growers Association's board of directors has scheduled the annual series of "county elections" for citrus grower representatives to serve on the 2015-16 association board. The board reports that this year's elections will be held on May 21st and 22nd as governed by GCGA's by-laws.

Bob Newsome, GCGA Secretary and chairman of the association's nominating committee, notes that each of the counties within the organization's five-county service area is entitled to at least one director to serve on the board. GCGA's 2015-16 directors will be elected by grower mem-

bers at each county's "annual meeting" as defined in the association's by-laws.

The details of this year's elections, including the schedules and logistical information for each of the individual county meetings, along with the necessary participation forms and ballots, will be sent to each GCGA "grower" member prior to the county elections. Based on the association's current "grower" membership, Charlotte, Glades and Lee counties will each vote to elect one (1) director. Collier will elect three (3) directors. Hendry will elect five (5) directors.

The dates, times and locations of each

"county" annual meeting to elect directors and conduct business are listed below.

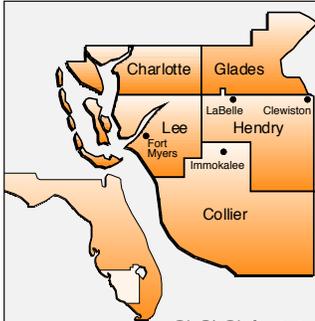
Ballots to elect two (2) "At Large" directors will also be mailed to GCGA's "grower" members along with the voting schedules and election details.

The board has recommended that the association's two "At-Large" directors be elected by ballot. So please vote for these directors with the "official" ballot labeled "At Large" that will be included in the "elections" information which will be mailed to members. The "At Large" director ballots are due in the GCGA offices May 27th.



2014-2015 Gulf Citrus Growers Association Board of Directors

Back, left to right: Ron Mahan, Carey Soud, Bryan Paul, Joe Hilliard II, Danny Sutton and Ron Hamel. Front, left to right: Paul Meador, Sam Jones, Aaron Troyer, Wayne Simmons and David Wheeler. Board members absent from photograph are: Mike Murphy and Bob Newsome.



Florida's Gulf Citrus Production Region

The Gulf Citrus Growers Association represents thousands of acres of citrus groves in Southwest Florida's "Gulf" region, which is officially designated as a production region in state statutes. The region accounts for about 25% of Florida's total fruit production. The region's citrus industry generates nearly \$1-billion of total economic impact.

GCGA 2014-2015 Board of Directors

Charlotte County

Ron Mahan
Orange-Co, LP

Collier County

Paul Meador
Gulf Citrus Partner LP

Mike Murphy
Cooperative Producers, Inc.

Bob Newsome
Barron Collier Partnership

Hendry County

Joe Hilliard II
Hilliard Brothers
of Florida, LTD

Sam Jones
A. Duda & Sons, Inc.

Wayne Simmons
LaBelle Fruit Co. LLC

Carey Soud
Soud Family Partnership

Danny Sutton
Alico, Inc.

Glades County

David Wheeler
Wheeler Farms, Inc.

Lee County

Aaron Troyer
Troyer Brothers, Inc.

At-Large Director

Bryan Paul
Bryan Paul Citrus

2015-2016 Directors' Elections

Thursday, May 21st

Charlotte County (One director)

8:30 a.m. GCGA Offices
Ft. Myers

Hendry County (Five directors)

11:00 a.m. Southern Heritage Real
Estate
LaBelle

Friday, May 22nd

Glades County (One director)

9:00 a.m. GCGA Offices
Ft. Myers

Lee County (One director)

9:15 a.m. GCGA Offices; Ft. Myers

Collier County (Three directors)

11:00 a.m. UF/IFAS SWFREC
Immokalee

Wednesday, May 27th

At Large Ballots Due (Two Directors)

15th Annual GCGA “Country GALA” Sets New Record



“Country GALA” Continues to Bring “City” and “Country” Folks Together!

At the 15th Annual “Gulf Citrus” Country GALA, the Hendry County Cattlemen’s Association cooked and served over 350 of their special-cut ribeye steaks to a record number of folks from throughout the state and region! The LaBelle Civic Center was decked-out in bright “citrus” colors for the festive evening occasion which featured live and silent auctions, a bucket raffle, music and lots and lots of “networking”!

This year’s GALA, held the evening of March 28th, was supported by a record 89 sponsors including 12 Platinum (\$1000), 34 Gold (\$500) and 43 Silver (\$250); which broke the all-time record for total sponsorship income for the event! **(Please note our sponsors, supporters and contributors on page 5).**

The GCGA “Country GALA” has become the association’s most successful fundraising event. Funds raised from the GALA go to support the organization’s many community and governmental outreach programs focused primarily in the Southwest Florida region.

The association would like to thank ALL the volunteers who made this year’s GALA an extra-special event! From every perspective, the 15th Annual “Country GALA” was one of the very best social events ever hosted by GCGA! “Our association continues to enjoy support from our region’s top resorts, restaurants and businesses that have provided first-class venues for our attendees to enjoy year around,” noted Ron Hamel, GCGA’s

executive vice president. “This support truly endorses and enhances our association’s level of community outreach and recognition that GCGA has developed in our 5-county region,” he added. “We are truly blessed with the high level of generosity that our local businesses provide.”

GCGA would also like to thank the Hendry County Cattlemen’s Association, Peggy Hampton and Troyer Brothers, Inc. for serving the tastiest steak dinner this side of heaven!

Plans are already underway for the 16th Annual “Country GALA” scheduled for April 2nd 2016! Ya’ll make plans to come!

THANKS!

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Cooperative Three, Inc. ♦ Cutrale Citrus Juices USA, Inc. ♦ Dundee Citrus Growers Assn.
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LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort (Katie Sproul, Barron Collier Companies)
Tim Lewis ♦ Captain Phillip O'Bannon ♦ Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina
Prawnbroker Restaurant ♦ Quail Creek Plantation
Rabo Agri Finance (Denise Stenbridge) ♦ Bob Richardson
Congressman Tom Rooney ♦ Sanibel Harbour Marriott Resort & Spa
Shula's Steak House ♦ South Seas Island Resort
Stilwell Enterprises & Restaurant Group ♦ The Firestone ♦ The Hilton Naples
The Inlet on the Waterfront ♦ The Turtle Club Restaurant
The Veranda Restaurant ♦ Troyer Brothers ♦ 'Tween Waters Inn ♦ Verandah Club

“Gulf” Growers Replant and Plan for the Future

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We plan to continue to have a strong presence in Florida’s fresh fruit business,” said Jones. “We continue to have a wide range of customers for our ‘Gulf’ fruit marketed under the ‘Dandy’ label and packed exclusively by Peace River Packing.”

Atchley added, “We are working together every day to deal with the challenges, because HLB is not going away. The key is to keep the momentum going towards what we need to survive this disease. We are finding answers which enable us to grow citrus and remain successful. Part of our success is a positive mindset. Our industry has great ideas and good people working on solutions. We have to keep them focused, funded and moving forward.”

Progressive citrus management is also evident at Cooperative Producers, Inc., Cooperative Three, Inc. and Ranch One Cooperative, Inc. operations here in the “Gulf” region. The cooperatives’ Vice President of Grove Operations Tom Kirschner noted that initially, the strategy to deal with HLB was to reduce the inoculum in their groves by resetting. He explained that due to the co-ops’ structure, solid replanting was economically unfeasible. “We initiated an aggressive program to remove and reset trees within our groves. Since 2007-08, we have planted over a quarter-million trees in our groves. This is not all due to HLB, but also to blight...since many trees were planted in the mid-80’s with old rootstocks. Today, we are sure glad we jumped in with a very aggressive resetting program...and have continued to do so! Today, we have 6 to 7 year old trees that were producing before ‘greening’ came in. We were lucky to start resetting when we did.”

Kirschner continued, “Today, a number of our member growers are also participating in the new USDA Tree Assistance Program (TAP), and some in the Florida’s Natural Growers ‘Plant Incentive Program’. These programs are enabling us to plant some solid blocks. We are in the process of doing that, and are planning to reset more solid blocks next year.”

Like DUDA, the three co-ops are producing citrus for both the processed and fresh markets. Kirschner reported that the level of fruit going “fresh” has increased

dramatically over the past two to three years. “Because we kept an aggressive removal program in place, along with aggressive psyllid control...our overall disease infection rate has been reduced. More of our fruit is going to packinghouses. We are now packing 60% of our total crop from down here, and about 40% goes to the juice market,” said Kirschner. “It has been expensive to initiate and continue our programs, but the efforts have really paid off.”

The Gardinier Florida Citrus company is also planting resets in their groves. At GFC’s Alexander Grove near LaBelle, Stephane Gardinier reported that his company is planting resets every month. “Five to eight years ago, we were all scratching our heads, trying to figure out how to deal with HLB. Today, we are learning something new every six months through research. I really feel that we can control the psyllids and even the disease. At GFC, our current policy is that we are resetting all our groves first,” he said. “Hopefully, by the time we reset entire grove blocks, we will have more resistance in the trees,” Gardinier added. “When we replant...we are planning to set 200/220 trees per acre, a tree density that is in the middle between our current numbers and higher densities of 300.”

Lee Jones, GFC’s general manager, added, “I feel we are over the hump...and have learned a lot in the past decade. Here in the flat woods...the growers have done a good job of controlling the psyllids and adding nutrition therapy to their groves. Groves are on the upswing, and I am more optimistic than I have ever been with citrus. Today, we are managing our groves more like a vegetable crop. We are taking tissue samples and analyzing them. We are looking block by block, and managing groves with more precise detail. We are doing a lot more testing and coordination. For me...this is a most exciting time to be in the groves. It is all about ‘management’ and execution of a good grove plan. When you find the right combination of cultural practices within your grove blocks, and trees respond in a positive way...even in the face of ‘greening’...you know you are doing it right. That is very rewarding,” Jones exclaimed.

“I feel confident going forward that we

know how to grow citrus with ‘greening’. The only thing that I feel is on shaky ground now...is the price of fruit,” said Gardinier. “It now costs \$2300 per acre to produce citrus with HLB. As long as fruit prices stay up, I think we will be fine. But \$1.30-\$1.40 per pound of solids is not sustainable. Hopefully the processors realize this.” He added, “It is encouraging to see companies like A. DUDA, Ben Hill Griffin, Inc. and Alico, Inc. investing, resetting and replanting groves. I, too, am optimistic! Yes, we are worried and concerned with the risks, but we believe in the industry.”

Recently, Lee County based Tamiami Citrus, LP (formerly Orange Co.) began purchasing properties to grow citrus. Chief Financial Officer Ron Mahan reported that the company is currently acquiring properties, including existing groves that the company plans to maintain and/or reset. “In some cases, we will remove the existing trees and replace them with the new varieties and rootstocks that are currently available,” he said. “We plan to replant utilizing the latest technology in our grove.”

“We certainly believe that the ‘Gulf’ region’s climate and other characteristics bode well for citrus. The region’s leaders have been working cooperatively through GCGA to control psyllid populations. Cooperation amongst growers is definitely necessary. The area wide spraying in the ‘Gulf’ region has been very effective” Mahan added. “In addition, we are finding ways of keeping trees healthy, productive and profitable under HLB conditions. We are using different chemistries in fertilizers and/or other nutrient materials,” he noted.

Mahan also said that Florida growers are geared to growing quality oranges for the not-from-concentrate (NFC) market, which American consumers have learned to enjoy and demand. “I think the new citrus varieties that are becoming available offer a lot of promise by improving juice quality earlier in the season. It really excites me to think that soon...these new varieties of orange trees can be available. We feel that Florida’s citrus industry will rebound with increased production of higher quality juice which will help bring retail prices down and OJ consumption up,” he added.



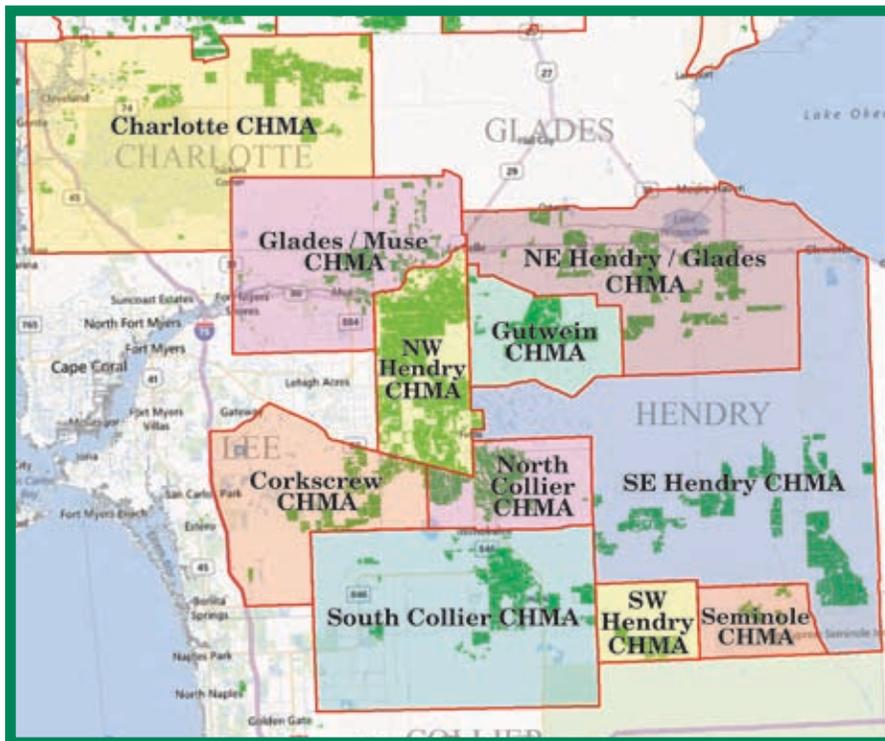
“Gulf” CHMAs Continue ACP Reduction Progress

Following the decision by the Gulf Citrus Growers Association’s CHMAs “management team” to subdivide the initially-created “Gulf” citrus health management area (CHMA) into 11 more compact CHMAs, a review of the past few years of survey data confirms the successful results of the recommended change in structure and operations.

Based on a recent review of the most successful Citrus Health Management Areas (CHMAs) functioning throughout the state, citrus growers in the “Gulf” production region can take pride in the fact that Southwest Florida’s CHMAs rank among the most successful in reducing psyllid populations!

The charts below, created by Dr. James Tansey, UF/IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center’s postdoctoral associate, indicate the continual success of the “Gulf” region’s CHMA implementation and management efforts.

According to Dr. Tansey, working with Dr. Phil Stansly at the SWFREC in Immokalee, seasonal ACP peak severities and overall counts continue to decline in the “Gulf” CHMAs as a whole. “In my opinion, the collective, cooperative spraying efforts in the ‘Gulf’ CHMAs are contributing significantly to reduced ACP numbers. CHMA team captains, by leading coordinated dormant sprays and responses to emerging ACP populations, should get a lot of credit for this trend,” Dr. Tansey said. He pointed out that the charts reflect the average number of ACP/50 tap samples from each surveyed block, and 10

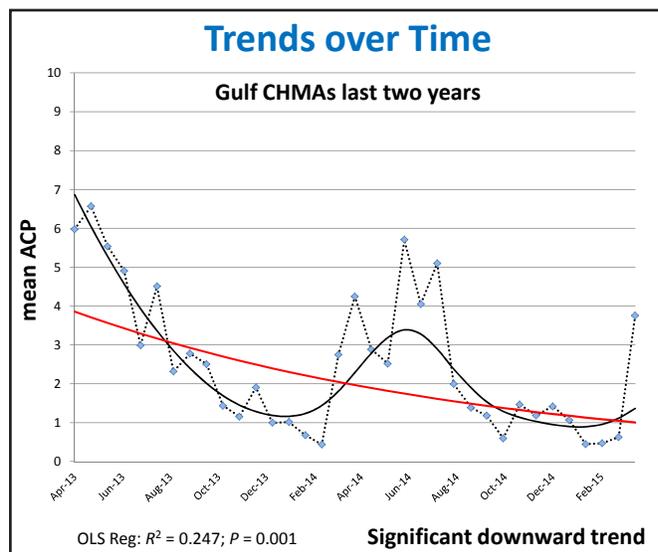
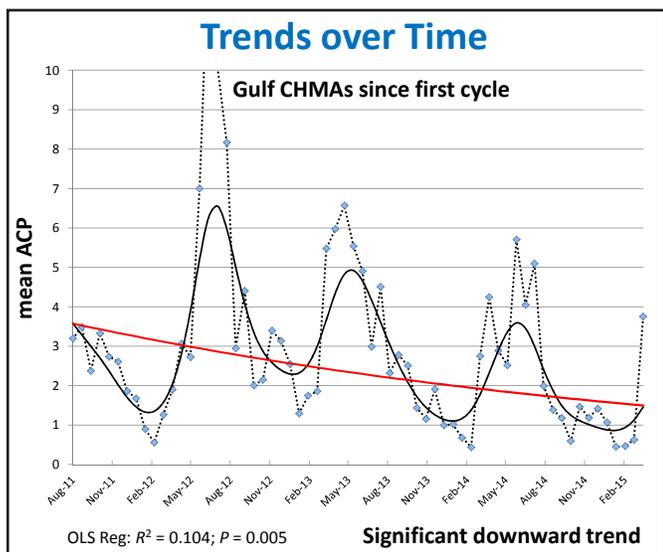


“tap samples” are taken at each corner and 10 in the middle of each block.

Tom Kirschner, Chairman of GCGA’s production and research committee, who has been heading up the “Gulf” CHMAs “team” is pleased with the more intensified efforts of the “team captains” and the change to multiple CHMAs in the region. “I’m very happy with the participation of our “Gulf” citrus growers. Most growers in the area are on very aggressive psyllid control programs and have worked well in coordinating sprays with other growers in

their CHMAs,” said Kirschner. “By looking at the recent survey data...it is encouraging to see that our efforts in the “Gulf” region are paying off in reduced ACP counts,” he added.

Many growers in the region are reporting that they are spraying their groves monthly, and also participating in the region’s coordinated sprays. Plans are underway for bringing “Gulf” CHMA “team captains” together, along with the other members of the region’s CHMA management leadership following the 2014-15 season.



These charts, created by Dr. James Tansey, UF/IFAS SWFL Research and Education Center’s postdoctoral associate, clearly indicate the continual success of the “Gulf” region’s CHMA implementation and management efforts.

News



**Gulf Citrus
Growers**
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GCGA's Government & Community Outreach Continues...

During the past few months, "Gulf Citrus" leaders continued to reach out to our region's governmental and community leaders to discuss the citrus and agricultural issues of importance to Southwest Florida.

During December and January, roundtable discussions were held with Congressmen Mario Diaz-Balart, Tom Rooney and their staffs on the federal issues. GCGA Governmental Affairs Chair, Garrett Wallace provided excellent leadership. The agendas included Farm Bill funding for HLB research, the USDA's Tree Assistance Program, immigration reform/H-2A program and the impact of EPA/USACOE "Waters of the U.S." rule.



Tom Kirschner discusses HLB!

GCGA's Production and Research Committee Chairman, Tom Kirschner hosted an educational "tour" of his company's groves

for U.S. Senator Bill Nelson's staff members Susie Perez Quinn, deputy chief of staff for policy, and Mary O'Bannon, SW Florida regional director. Although the Senate staffers were primarily interested in seeing the devastating impacts of "citrus greening," they also wanted to learn more about the canker and black spot diseases. During the four-hour "visit", Kirschner answered many questions about HLB and the other diseases, and explained how his company is dealing with them, including participation in the "Gulf CHMA" coordinated sprays.

Paul Meador, GCGA vice president and FCM board member, and Ron Hamel represented "Gulf Citrus" in the Florida citrus industry's mid-January "fly-in" to Tallahassee coordinated by Florida Citrus Mutual. The "citrus delegation" called upon the key legislative leadership to support funding for HLB research/protection, UF/IFAS funding (including funds for the SWFREC), FDACS' citrus program support and agricultural tax exemptions. Sessions were held with Senate President Andy Gardener, House Speaker Steve Crisafulli, House State Affairs Committee Chairman, Matt Caldwell and Agriculture & Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ben Albritton.

GCGA, along with UF/IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center, the Barron Collier Company, Alico, Inc. and Southern Gardens Citrus continued its many years of hosting the Chamber of Southwest Florida's annual Leadership Lee County "Agricultural Day." The Leadership Lee "class," featuring the region's future leaders, spends a day visiting key AG operations to learn about the issues facing growers,



John Hoffman explains harvesting.

farmers and ranchers. Barron Collier's John Hoffman has hosted the citrus grove presentation for many years, answering questions ranging from citrus varieties to water and wildlife management. The grove "visit" includes "hands-on" experience in harvesting oranges!