

Summary of December 17-18, 2007 Greening Summit

Introduction: On Dec. 17-18 in Bethesda, Md., Florida Citrus Mutual took part in a national “Greening Summit” organized by the United States Department of Agriculture. More than 60 people representing a cross section of agricultural sectors including regulatory, research and industry attended the event. The meeting was designed to gather and share information. Attendees analyzed the greening issue from a high level perspective and came to the conclusion greening is not just a Florida problem, it is a national problem that we need to attack collectively in order to keep U.S. citrus production viable in the future. Currently, the psyllid is found in Mexico, Texas and Florida so all citrus-producing states are very concerned about a full-fledged greening outbreak. The summit was a great first step but we all agreed there is much work to be done.

Attendees:

- Michael W. Sparks, executive VP/CEO Florida Citrus Mutual
- Dr. Bruce Knight, USDA undersecretary marketing and regulatory programs
- Dr. Gale Buchanan, undersecretary, research, education and economics
- Cindy Smith, acting director USDA APHIS
- Dr. Timothy Gottwald, of the USDA's Horticultural Research Laboratory in Fort Pierce
- Dr. David Kaplan, assistant deputy administrator for USDA APHIS' plant protection and quarantine program.
- Dr. Mike Irey and Ricke Kresse of U.S. Sugar Corp.
- Richard Kinney, CEO Florida Citrus Packers, and state officials from Texas, Calif., Hawaii, Puerto Rico.

Discussion Points:

- One primary goal among attendees is to improve nationwide coordination among researchers in each citrus producing state so there is no duplication and research is completed as quickly and efficiently as possible. The coordinated research efforts need to take on a “Manhattan Project” sense of urgency. The discussion mirrored what we talked about in Florida a year ago.

- Pursue a cooperative effort to identify and secure funding. Leverage the collective lobbying power of the citrus states Legislative delegations to uncover federal funding options.
- The regulators in attendance will explore how to improve the preparedness of states that don't have greening and how can they prevent it from spreading further where it occurs. "How can we respond effectively, and how can we recover and keep the industry viable and going?" is how APHIS' Dr. David Kaplan posed the question.
- The industry needs to develop an early detection tool for greening.
- We also should work towards a better understanding of the psyllid in Mexico so we can be prepared once it hits the United States.
- The regulators, industry representative and research scientists all recognized the need for leadership, coalition building and stakeholder involvement as this process moves forward.

Next Steps:

- Bring the U.S. Citrus Council into the discussion. The U.S. Citrus Council is in excellent position to help coordinate this nationwide effort to defeat greening. Mutual sits on the board of the Council and recently met with citrus representatives from Texas, California and Arizona to discuss the Council's mission and strategies going forward. All of the states involved are competitors on some level but we collectively agree that greening is a threat to all of us and consequently we must cooperate to beat it. The U.S. Citrus Council will meet early next year and discuss what role it can play moving forward.
- By February 2008, the USDA will publish a summation of the meeting that documents the issues discussed, the regulatory structure and industry roles and responsibilities. The USDA will also issue a list of recommendations. Another greening summit is scheduled for sometime next year and participants promised to keep lines of communication open in the coming months.