

“Ask the Citrus Expert”

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Canker Eradication Program Comes to End:

Growers ask what back-to-basics approaches are recommended

The past year has clearly demonstrated the destructive power of Mother Nature. The Florida citrus canker eradication program is yet another casualty.

“The canker eradication program that has been running for several years has been essentially terminated,” said Pete Timmer, Ph.D., professor of plant pathology at the University of Florida’s Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred. “The hurricanes of 2004 spread a great deal of canker, then Hurricane Wilma spread the disease even more last year. We have found that the spread is so extensive that the disease can no longer be eradicated.”

The termination of the program also ended enforcement of the “1,900-foot rule,” which stipulated the eradication distance from individual canker-affected trees. “That rule has been suspended for the time

being,” Timmer said. “The problem at the moment is that there is no rule to replace it. Things are in a state of turmoil, but work is continuing to find substitute measures to reduce disease spread.”

At a time when there appears to be more questions than answers, Timmer urges growers to implement an integrated program in their groves. The components are familiar to most growers:

Suppression. “In those areas where canker is present on only a few trees, we recommend inoculum suppression,” he said. “Growers can destroy trees in situations where there is a limited amount of disease and reduce spread.”

Windbreaks. “With new and established plantings, we are recommending also planting windbreaks,” Timmer said. “Windbreaks can be very effective in reducing disease severity.”

Treatment. “Copper products are the only effective bactericides and sprays can be applied to protect fruit,” he said.



Insect control. “Leafminer damage also is an important factor in increasing the amount of canker that occurs,” Timmer said, “so leafminer control is another key aspect of an integrated program.”

Information. “We are conducting a series of programs on canker management around the state,” he said. “We are seeking input from growers, consultants and the rest of the industry.”

Educational programs are being conducted statewide to assist growers in dealing with this important problem. Additional information is available on the CREC Web site at www.crec.ifas.ufl.edu.

Researchers are hard at work to develop new guidelines for canker management in Florida. In the meantime, paying close attention to the basics will be the best way for growers to weather the storm.

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