

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board

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To: Dr. Catherine E. Woteki
Undersecretary, Research, Education, and Economics
Chief Scientist, USDA

Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy
Director, National Institute of Food and Agriculture

From: Milo Shult
Chair, NAREEE Advisory Board



Tom Jerkins
Chair, Citrus Disease Subcommittee



RE: Citrus Disease Subcommittee's Recommendations for the Priorities, Agenda, and Budget
for the FY2015 Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program

Section 7103 of the *Agricultural Act of 2014* (Farm Bill) established the Citrus Disease Subcommittee (CDS) as a permanent subcommittee of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board which requires the CDS to provide an annual consultation with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to: propose a research and extension agenda and annual budgets for the funds made available for the Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program (CDRE); recommend annual priorities for the award of the CDRE grants; and to provide comments on the grants awarded by the CDRE in the previous fiscal year.

The CDS met on December 9-11, 2014, to provide their annual consultation with NIFA to develop their recommendations on the research and extension agenda, annual budgets, and annual priorities for the FY2015 CDRE program. The CDS successfully accomplished these goals. Due to NIFA's time constraints for releasing the Request for Applications (RFA), this letter is meant to convey the priorities for the program. A formal report and recommendations will be forthcoming.

By a majority vote, the CDS recommends the following:

- 1) *Agenda*. CDRE funding in FY2015 should continue to focus on Huanglongbing (HLB).
- 2) *Budget*. All of the FY2015 budget of \$25 million should be obligated during that year.
- 3) *Priorities*. The funding priorities for FY2015 are the following items, in ranked order:
 1. Chemical and heat therapy systems to kill or suppress bacteria.
 2. Culturing (cultivating) the *CLas* bacterium.
 3. Early detection of the bacterium in host and vector.
 4. Resistant germplasm.
 5. At a low priority, other topics, such as attract and kill/suppression are encouraged if they are of scientific high quality and relevant to the needs of the industry.

Note: The CDS explicitly acknowledged that while the first four items are of highest priority for research funding, this list does not preclude proposals being funded on other topics (such as attract and kill/suppression) if they are of scientific high quality and relevant to the needs of the industry. Encouraging innovation and new approaches to the challenges identified will likely result in additional solutions to HLB and citrus greening.

In addition to the recommendations above, the **CDS strongly encourages NIFA to identify the ranked order of the priorities in the RFA for the FY 2015 CDRE**. The FY 2014 RFA identified 29 priorities with no categorical ranking. Therefore, the ranked priorities set by CDS for FY 2014 may not have been adequately communicated in the RFA to ensure that the industry ranked priorities were adequately addressed by the submitted proposals. The CDS believes we can significantly improve on this approach with the priorities and guidance provided in this memo. Identifying the rankings will communicate the most important needs of the citrus industry to potential applicants.

The CDS recommends that NIFA include a statement in the RFA that the priorities are based on consultation with the CDS. There was general industry concern that the priorities in the FY2014 RFA were not influenced by the CDS. The members of the CDS are well-regarded within the citrus industry and encourage NIFA to utilize their influence to help communicate the concerted effort between the subcommittee and federal agencies.

Lastly, **the CDS strongly encourages NIFA to announce the awards on a predictable schedule**. The CDS would point out that the timeliness of the announcement of the FY 2014 awards was delayed in such a way to be disruptive to the purposes of the CDS as well as for the industry at large. The CDS was not provided specifics on the FY 2014 CDRE awards at the meeting in December 2014. This made it challenging to make recommendations for the FY 2015 priorities. A significant part of the RFA “cycle” presented at the first CDS meeting in May 2014 by Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, NIFA Director, clearly indicated the dovetail role of the CDS in pivoting from the most recent awards to the next sequence of RFA’s. That did not occur in cycle for this year. The CDS was left with “general categories” of the awards and very limited

specifics. **The CDS recommends that they should not meet in the future until the previous year's grant awards have been finalized.**

This delay is also disruptive to industry. Prior to the Farm Bill creation of the CDRE program, the individual states have invested over \$100M in research projects and their management. Because these other entities (specifically, the Citrus Research Development Foundation (CRDF; Florida) and Citrus Research Board (CRB; California)) focus on the research not funded by Federal dollars, they are unable to solicit until the announcement has been made publicly available. The CRDF and CRB have invested heavily in process necessary to obtain additional state and donor funding, both of which often have constraints. Disrupting that process is counterproductive for industry as it seeks to fill these research gaps.

As mentioned previously, the CDS will ultimately provide a formal report and recommendations to the Secretary which will include these recommendations and several other over-arching recommendations related to citrus disease research, extension, and development. The report will also provide more detailed comments on the previous year's grant awards once they are publicly announced.

We ask that you convey our recommendations to the Secretary and to NIFA leadership for inclusion and consideration in the FY2015 CDRE RFA and program. On behalf of the CDS, we look forward to our continued work and collaboration on this important issue.