

Citrus Disease Subcommittee

March 1, 2016

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

The Citrus Disease Subcommittee (CDS) met on February 17-18, 2016 in Riverside, CA, to provide their mandated, annual consultation with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to develop recommendations on the research and extension agenda, annual budgets, and annual priorities for the FY2016 Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program (CDRE). The CDS successfully accomplished these goals and this letter is meant to convey their recommendations.

Section 7103 of the *Agricultural Act of 2014* (Farm Bill) established the CDS, a permanent subcommittee of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board, to provide advice and guidance on citrus research, development and extension needs and to provide an annual consultation with NIFA to: propose a research and extension agenda and annual budgets for the funds made available for the 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 commends USDA and NIFA for the implementation of their recommendations in their previous consultation. While the citrus industry is continuing to struggle with combatting citrus greening, the prospective outcomes of the research being funded by the CDRE, along with other federal, state, and private research efforts, have potential to help the industry. Overall, the grants awarded in FY2015 match the intent of the recommendations and priorities made by the CDS.

In accordance with their mandated charge, **the CDS recommends the following for the FY2016 CDRE:**

- 1) *Agenda*. CDRE funding in FY2016 should continue to focus exclusively on Huanglongbing (HLB).
- 2) *Budget*. All of the CDRE funds available should be expended in the next fiscal year.
- 3) *Priorities*. The funding priorities for FY2016 are the following items:
 - Culturing or cultivating the *Candidatus Liberibacter asiaticus* (CLas) bacterium.
 - Development of tolerance or resistance in commercial citrus in all production areas with a focus on delivery of new cultivars (or rootstocks and scions) using all available strategies.
 - Early detection of the bacterium in host and vector.
 - Therapies to prevent or suppress CLas bacteria within trees.

While these priority funding areas are of the utmost importance to the citrus industry, the CDS wants to avoid excluding potentially valuable proposals that may help the citrus industry. Therefore, **the CDS**

recommends that NIFA include the following statement in the RFA: *These are the priorities for the CDRE but they do not exclude other viable topics that address HLB management in citrus production.*

The members of the CDS acknowledge and respect the role of the relevancy review to ensure that the most relevant proposals are considered. The members of the CDS discussed the purpose and effectiveness of the relevancy review and generally agreed that **a more thorough and descriptive assessment of the process and intent should be conveyed to the members of the relevancy review panels to obtain a more balanced and consistent assessment of all projects.**

The CDS specifically determined that they do not want NIFA to identify the 2016 priorities in a ranked order in the RFA. The members feel that all of the priorities are of the highest significance. However, **in the event that there are proposals similarly ranked in the relevance and scientific merit reviews, the CDS recommends that NIFA should select the final awards based on the following ranked order:**

- 1) Therapies to prevent or suppress CLas bacteria within trees.
- 2) Development of tolerance or resistance in commercial citrus in all production areas with a focus on delivery of new cultivars [or rootstocks and scions] using all available strategies.
- 3) Culturing or cultivating the CLas bacterium.
- 4) Early detection of the bacterium in host and vector.

The CDS acknowledges that there is a need for short, medium, and long term solutions, however, the need for immediate field delivery of viable solutions to combat HLB is of the utmost importance to the CDS. **The CDS recommends that the relevancy review panels give priority to projects that have the potential for more immediate field delivery.**

In the consultation with the CDS, NIFA communicated that the research community focused on citrus research issues specifically related to HLB may be exhausted. The solution to effectively combatting and potentially eradicating HLB may be found in an area of research not specifically tied to citrus diseases. **Therefore, the CDS recommends that additional outreach should be conducted to the larger scientific community about this important granting opportunity.** The CDS members are willing to assist conveyance of the FY 2016 CDRE research agenda to potential research functions. In addition, the effects of HLB on the citrus industry are not well known to the greater general public. **The CDS also recommends that USDA help raise the awareness of issues impacting the citrus industry to the general public.** Not only does outreach and education improve the chances of early detection, it also has the potential to identify new and innovative solutions.

At the February 2016 meeting of the CDS, the CDS members heard presentations from the 2014 CDRE Project Directors on the remarkable work being completed including, the objectives, approach, and recent accomplishments. Overwhelming, the members of the CDS were impressed by the progress of the projects and **recommend that the Project Directors continue to be included in future meetings of the CDS.**

In the consultation with the CDS, NIFA communicated the need to identify and recruit additional relevancy reviewers for future granting cycles of the CDRE. The CDS members committed to helping

promote and recruit new relevancy reviewers. **The CDS recommends NIFA provide a one page fact sheet on the expectations, time commitment, and timeline of the relevancy review.**

We ask that you convey our recommendations 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.

Sincerely,



Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen
Chair, NAREEE Advisory Board



Mr. Walter T. Jerkins
Chair, Citrus Disease Subcommittee

cc:

Dr. Catherine Woteki, REE Under Secretary/USDA Chief Scientist

Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, Director, NIFA

Dr. Parag Chitnis, Deputy Director, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, NIFA