

Notes from the CEO

By John Krist

Nearly 500 researchers, government agency staff and citrus industry representatives from 24 nations gathered in Orlando, Fla., in mid-March for the Fifth International Research Conference on Huanglongbing. Over the course of three days, 130 research teams presented reports on their inquiries

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into every imaginable facet of the Asian citrus psyllid and the devastating bacterial disease it transmits, while another 55 contributed posters on their work.

It was an impressive (if at times mind-numbing) display of technical and scientific firepower brought to bear on the greatest scourge the citrus industry has ever faced. But having also attended the 4th conference two years ago, I was most struck this year by how few practical tools this enormous global under-

taking has produced.

Many of the presentations in 2017 were updates on research projects that also were the subject of presentations in 2015 and 2013. But time after time, two more years of work has seemed only to generate new questions and uncertainties about the complex vector-host-pathogen relationship while providing no new method for disrupting it. Research in molecular biology, genomics, metabolomics, proteomics and other fields continues to reveal fascinating things about the bug, the bacteria and their deadly effect on citrus. Yet we still have no better tools for killing or disabling ACP, neutralizing the pathogen, or preventing trees from becoming sick and dying.

Meanwhile, the grim toll on Florida's citrus industry, which has been steadily succumbing to the HLB epidemic

since its arrival more than a decade ago, continues to mount. Since 2002, Florida's annual citrus production has fallen from 282 million boxes to 81 million boxes, a decline of 71 percent. Planted acreage has declined 40 percent, from nearly 800,000 acres to 480,000, and 130,684 acres of orchard stand abandoned.

There has been incremental progress, to be sure. Florida growers have become better at extending the productive life of their slowly dying trees through improved

nutrition and better management of soil and water chemistry. Identification of potentially disease-tolerant root stocks is progressing, albeit slowly. (In a weird way, Florida's unfolding disaster is helping with this, as it constitutes a vast natural field trial. Amid thousands of dead and dying trees, growers occasionally find one that appears perfectly healthy; this "last tree standing" phenomenon might reveal natural genetic variations that confer tolerance.)

There also have been undeniable advances in understanding how the bug and the pathogen function, and how they interact with each other and the host tree, at the molecular and genetic levels. With the advent of a powerful new genome editing tool – CRISPR-Cas9, which became widely available only within the past two years – researchers now have the ability to capitalize on this new understanding by precisely modifying the DNA of host, vector or pathogen in ways that might shut down the epidemic.

Such developments will take time, however, and time is not on California's side.

Two years ago, at the fourth IRCHLB, Dave Bartels of the U.S. Department of Agriculture presented alarming data indicating that HLB had begun spreading throughout Southern California, well beyond the locations in the Los Angeles area where state and federal officials have confirmed it. We brought Dave to Ventura later that year to present his findings, and we have periodically updated the local citrus community on his mapping data. Last year, his work showed that Ventura County had several suspicious clusters of ACP samples that, when tested for presence of the pathogen that causes HLB, generated "inconclusive" results – the samples contain evidence of bacterial DNA, but at very low levels that do not meet state and federal thresholds for confirmation.

This year, Dave had even more test data to plot, and the message keeps getting worse. We now have multiple "hot spot" clusters in the Santa Clara River and Las Poses valleys, – including two locations where samples from trees generated "inconclusive" results that missed the regulatory confirmation standard for plant tissue by the barest of margins.

As a result, Farm Bureau and the ACP-HLB Task Force will place a priority in the next few months on following up on some of the rare good news that came out of Orlando: There are several early HLB detection technologies that, when evaluated in a rigorous double-blind trial, proved nearly 100 percent accurate in identifying HLB infection.

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Farm employers: prepare for stepped-up immigration enforcement

By Bryan Little

President Donald Trump has acted quickly to fulfill campaign promises to remove unauthorized immigrants already in the U.S. and discourage others from emigrating without authorization. Two executive orders issued in January were followed by memoranda from Department of Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly to define for DHS agencies such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Border Patrol how the orders are to be carried out.

The executive orders significantly broaden circumstances under which an unauthorized immigrant may be apprehended and deported. For example:

- Any immigrant in the country without authorization who is charged or convicted of any offense, has committed acts for which he or she could be charged with a crime, is suspected of a crime, or who an immigration officer deems a risk to public safety or national security will be prioritized for removal.

- The orders end a “catch-and-release” policy of releasing apprehended unauthorized immigrants within the U.S. and detaining immigrants who have crossed the border without authorization, pending a deportation hearing.

- Federal agencies will create regulations and policies allowing them to collect fines and penalties from immigrants and from people “who facilitate their unlawful presence,” and to prioritize removal of immigrants who have engaged in “fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection of any official matter before a government agency.”

Taken together, it appears these two directives could prioritize assessing penalties against employers who may have facilitated the presence of unauthorized immigrants by hiring them knowing they were not employment-eligible, and prioritize the removal of employees who offered fraudulent documents to complete the I-9 process to obtain employment in the U.S.

- The orders authorize the hiring of 10,000 additional ICE agents and 5,000 additional Border Patrol agents.

- A federal program will be expanded that encourages cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement agencies.

- The orders authorize construction of a border wall and necessary infrastructure.

Many implications of the orders remain to

be played out, such as:

- Whether ICE will begin large-scale apprehensions of suspected unauthorized immigrants in areas distant from the border;

- Whether ICE will begin significant new worksite enforcement, including I-9 audits;

- Whether Congress will begin serious discussions about immigration reform.

There has been much congressional interest in an enforcement-only approach to immigration reform, including building the wall and requiring mandatory, universal use of the DHS E-Verify system, which can verify the authenticity of many (but not all) identity and work eligibility documents.

What does the future hold?

The California Farm Bureau Federation, American Farm Bureau Federation and many other organizations have long recognized that agriculture depends on a foreign-born workforce. These farm employees provide their employers with identity and work-eligibility documents that appear authentic in order to complete a Form I-9 when their employment begins, but which in fact aren't authentic.

Employers are not required to be “document cops” or to be trained to recognize inauthentic documents; in fact, asking too many questions about documents presented by a new employee can lead to a lawsuit against the employer, alleging employment discrimination.

Because of this “catch-22” situation, Farm Bureau advocates a two-part approach to modernize immigration law in order to help employees and employers on American farms:

1. Create a form of legal status that allows current agricultural employees to continue to provide Americans with high-quality food at reasonable prices. Farmers need employees who can live and work securely, continue to fill key jobs on farms, pay taxes, buy goods in local stores, and come and go across the U.S.-Mexico border to visit family and friends without fear.

2. Create an agricultural “guest worker” program that will be easier, simpler and less expensive to use than the current one. A program should allow employees and farmers the option of contracting with each other for agricultural work, or should allow approved U.S. farmers to hire any employee legally admitted to work on farms.

Since the early stages of his campaign, President Trump has said he wants to build

a border wall, but that there should be doors in the wall to allow entry of people whose presence will benefit our country and our economy. The reality of food production and the agricultural workforce is clear: Americans' food will likely be grown, harvested and processed in the future by the same people as today; the only question is whether the farms they work on will be in the U.S. or in Mexico.

In recent days, I have received numerous calls and emails from farmers who report their employees are worried. The farmers want to know what their employees should do, regardless of their legal status; what farmers can do to help their employees; and what farmers should do in their role as employers.

Many organizations and agencies have prepared information that is widely available on the Internet, advising immigrants on their legal rights and how they should handle an encounter with law enforcement.

Farm employers can begin now to review their practices when creating, maintaining and storing Forms I-9, and be ready to comply with ICE requests to audit I-9s.

Farm Bureau's affiliated company, the Farm Employers Labor Service, furnishes subscribers and clients with technical assistance and information to enable them to assess their compliance with employment eligibility requirements. For more, including information on subscribing to the FELS Newsletter, see fels.net.

— Bryan Little is director of employment policy for the California Farm Bureau Federation and chief operating officer of the Farm Employers Labor Service. This commentary first appeared in the March 1 issue of *Ag Alert*, published by CFBF.

Notes from the CEO

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Deploying them here as soon as possible is critical. The key to survival for Ventura County citrus will be finding infected trees long before they start showing symptoms, and long before they harbor bacteria in such large numbers that the regulatory DNA tests finally can confirm it. True early detection of infection and immediate removal of those trees are essential if we are to stick around long enough to benefit from Florida's misfortune.

— John Krist is chief executive officer of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County. Contact him at john@farmbureauvc.com.

Ventura College to launch ag supervisor development program

By Annika Forester

Do you farm in Ventura County? Does the success of your operation rely on frontline supervisors who lead your workforce? Would you like to provide more consistent and higher quality training so your supervisors may be more effective? If your answers are "YES", then you may be pleased to learn that a new agricultural supervisor development program will be offered soon through Ventura College.

The program concept emerged through an ongoing dialogue between local agricultural employers and community advocates seeking to address their shared concern for improving the employee work experience as well as the image and success of Ventura County farm producers. Communication and people-management skills for agricultural supervisors are some of the least available yet most commonly requested training topics sought by both supervisors and employers alike. The pilot Ventura College program will address this longstanding need by offering highly focused content specific to our local production and personnel context. The pilot course will be designed to give participants practice applying an emotional-intelligence approach to resolving common workplace challenges.

Supervisors who participate in this program will become better prepared to attract and retain employees, give clear instructions, motivate their teams, give feedback, and handle conflict. In essence, the program seeks to increase supervisor effectiveness and productivity while reducing employer liability and demonstrating tangible progress towards meeting customers' social responsibility aspirations. While this program will surely be a valuable learning opportunity for your current supervisors, perhaps more importantly, it also promises a clear development path for the future supervisors you have yet to promote.

Employer input is currently sought to help determine both the content and delivery parameters of the program. The pilot is slated to begin before the end of 2017, lasting 10 to 12 weeks, meeting once or twice a week for 3 to 4 hours at a time. Classes will be held

at Ventura College, where employees will also be exposed to the many other learning opportunities available there including adult basic skills and English as a second language classes.

For the pilot, employers will pay a nominal fee to cover instructional costs for those employees they enroll. However, once the curriculum is tested and demand for the program is proven, it can then be formalized and upgraded to a non-credit Certificate Program. From that point forward, all subsequent instructional costs will be covered through Ventura College's funding sources – in other words, free of charge to employers.

The next step to bring this program to life is the needs assessment phase. Through the months of April and May, you and your frontline supervisors are invited to inform the pilot course design. We are seeking producers, managers, HR staff and current frontline supervisors to participate in brief interviews. We want to hear your perceptions of the areas of greatest need when it comes to communication and people-management skills for your supervisors. Your input will help us prioritize the selection of topics to address and skills to focus on for the pilot course and future courses or certificate programs to be developed.

To learn more about the new supervisor development program, to participate in our needs assessment interviews, or to inquire about joining the advisory group guiding the development of this program, please call Annika Forester at (805) 640-2525 or email at annikaforester@gmail.com.

— Annika Forester is a coach and organizational learning consultant whose previous employers include the California Strawberry Commission and Reiter Affiliated Companies.

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Member Benefits

TICKETS & DISCOUNTS

Farm Bureau members qualify for discounts on admission to many of Southern California's most popular theme parks and other attractions. To take advantage of any of these special offers, drop by the Farm Bureau office at 5156 McGrath St. in Ventura. You can also place an order and pay by phone, and have the tickets mailed to you. For more information, contact Farm Bureau at (805) 289-0155. Have your membership number handy. We accept Visa and MasterCard.

Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach; Adult (12+ yrs) \$20.95 (save \$9); Child (3-11 yrs) \$15.95 (save \$2). Valid thru 12/31/17. Closed 4/7-4/9 & 12/25/2017.

Cinemark & Rave Theatres — All Cinemark, Century & Rave locations; Platinum Super Save Ticket. Valid any regular movie anytime. Regular price up to \$9.25 (save \$2.75). Additional premiums may apply for specially priced films and/or events priced higher than normal box office. No expiration.

Knott's Berry Farm — Buena Park. Adult (12+ yrs) \$42.50 (save \$32.50); Junior (3 to 11 yrs) or Seniors (62+ yrs) \$39.95 (save \$5.05). Valid thru 12/31/2017.

Regal Entertainment Group — Good at Edwards, Regal, Signature & United Artists locations. Unrestricted premium ticket \$9.25 valid at any show. Surcharge applies to all IMAX, RPX, 3-D films & 4DX films. Other surcharges may apply to Premium or Luxury seating at selected theaters. No expiration.

San Diego Safari Park — Escondido. Adult (12+ yrs) \$45.00 (save \$7.00); Child (3 to 11 yrs) \$37.00 (save \$5.00). Includes Africa Tram, all shows and exhibits. Valid thru 12/31/17.

San Diego Sea World — Adult (10+ yrs) Single Day Ticket \$69.75 + get 2nd day free (save \$23.25). Child (3 to 9 yrs.) Single Day Ticket \$69.75 (savings \$17.25) + get 2nd Day Free. Both visits valid thru 12/31/17.

San Diego Zoo — Adult (12+ yrs) \$45.00 (save \$7.00); Child (3 to 11 yrs) \$37.00 (save \$5.00). Valid thru 12/31/17.

Six Flags Magic Mountain — Valencia. General admission (3yrs+) \$49.95 (save \$30.04). Valid thru 09/17/2017

See's Candy gift certificate — Valid at any See's Candy Shop in the U.S. One-pound candy gift certificate for \$16.45 (Save \$2.05). No expiration.

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