



NEWS RELEASE

Florida's Citrus Industry Battles Impacts of Citrus Greening Disease

State's citrus production has fallen by more than 40 percent over last the 11 years

DENVER, Colo. (September 2, 2016) — Florida citrus growers are at a crossroads as they continue battling the effects of citrus greening (also known as Huanglongbing – HLB), an as yet incurable plant disease that has ravaged Florida's citrus crops since its discovery in the state in 2005, according to a new report from CoBank.

Citrus greening – which results in half-green, bitter and oddly shaped fruit – has had a devastating impact on Florida's citrus industry with production falling by more than 40 percent over the past 11 years.

Carry-on effects of citrus greening include a reduction in the number of Florida orange juice processing plants and citrus packinghouses as well as a loss in the number of full- and part-time citrus industry jobs from 76,000 in 2003/04 to approximately 62,000 in 2012/13. Citrus canker, a less catastrophic disease, hurricanes and heightened cost pressures have also contributed to these declines.

With no cure for greening currently in hand, Florida growers have implemented a wide range of palliatives to help them limit and control the spread of the disease. The twin objectives are to maintain productivity and slow the rate of disease progression in order to lengthen the productive lifetime of existing trees. In many cases, growers have managed to combat the ill effects of greening by using these palliatives to nurse their trees and bolster production. However, these current efforts to fight the disease have contributed significantly to an increase in production costs.

“Severe as the citrus greening disease has already been for the Florida citrus industry, the situation is bound to worsen before it improves,” said Christine Lensing, CoBank's senior economist, specialty crops and author of the report. “The industry's determined efforts to fight the disease have not yet been successful, but a breakthrough cure – which will eventually come in the form of a disease-resistant tree – is expected within a few years.”

“But even then, the industry's woes will persist for a while longer,” said Christine Lensing. “It will take several more years to reset all of the state's diseased groves.”

The disease has been particularly hard on smaller, “mom-and-pop” growers, many of which have abandoned their groves and quit the industry as the result of citrus production costs that have more than doubled since 2003/04 to a range of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per acre. These exits have resulted in 130,000 acres of abandoned groves – many measuring just 20 acres or less – which are exacerbating the problem by allowing the psyllids, the vectors of the disease, to flourish unabated.

The majority of Florida's orange crop is processed into orange juice, the price of which has soared nearly 50 percent since 2004/05. Higher prices – combined with a growing consumer preference for a lower-sugar diet – have led to a 40 percent reduction in per capita consumption of orange juice between 2004/05 and 2014/15. While rising prices have helped support orange juice sales revenue, the prevailing consumption trend looms as another worrisome concern for Florida's citrus industry.

“Going forward, the big question is not whether Florida’s citrus industry will survive – it will – but rather how much of the industry will still be left when the greening problem is finally solved,” said Lensing.

A brief video synopsis of the report, “Florida’s Beleaguered Citrus Industry – At a Crossroads?” can be [found on CoBank’s YouTube Channel](#). The full report is available to media upon request.

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About CoBank

CoBank is a \$125 billion cooperative bank serving vital industries across rural America. The bank provides loans, leases, export financing and other financial services to agribusinesses and rural power, water and communications providers in all 50 states. The bank also provides wholesale loans and other financial services to affiliated Farm Credit associations serving more than 75,000 farmers, ranchers and other rural borrowers in 23 states around the country.

CoBank is a member of the Farm Credit System, a nationwide network of banks and retail lending associations chartered to support the borrowing needs of U.S. agriculture, rural infrastructure and rural communities. Headquartered outside Denver, Colorado, CoBank serves customers from regional banking centers across the U.S. and also maintains an international representative office in Singapore.

For more information about CoBank, visit the bank's web site at www.cobank.com.

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