

# *Florida Citrus Overview*

Huanglongbing (HLB)  
*aka* Citrus Greening:  
A Serious Threat to Our Industry

Michael W. Sparks  
Executive Vice President/CEO  
Florida Citrus Mutual

# Background

- Huanglongbing (HLB) is a bacterial disease that greatly reduces crop yields and can kill trees within two years.
- HLB is spread by the Asian citrus psyllid, a small insect which was first reported in Florida in 1998.
- The disease has severely affected citrus production in Asia, Africa, and Brazil.
- HLB specifically attacks citrus plants and presents no threat to humans or animals.



*Photo courtesy T.R. Gottwald and S.M. Garnsey*

# Background

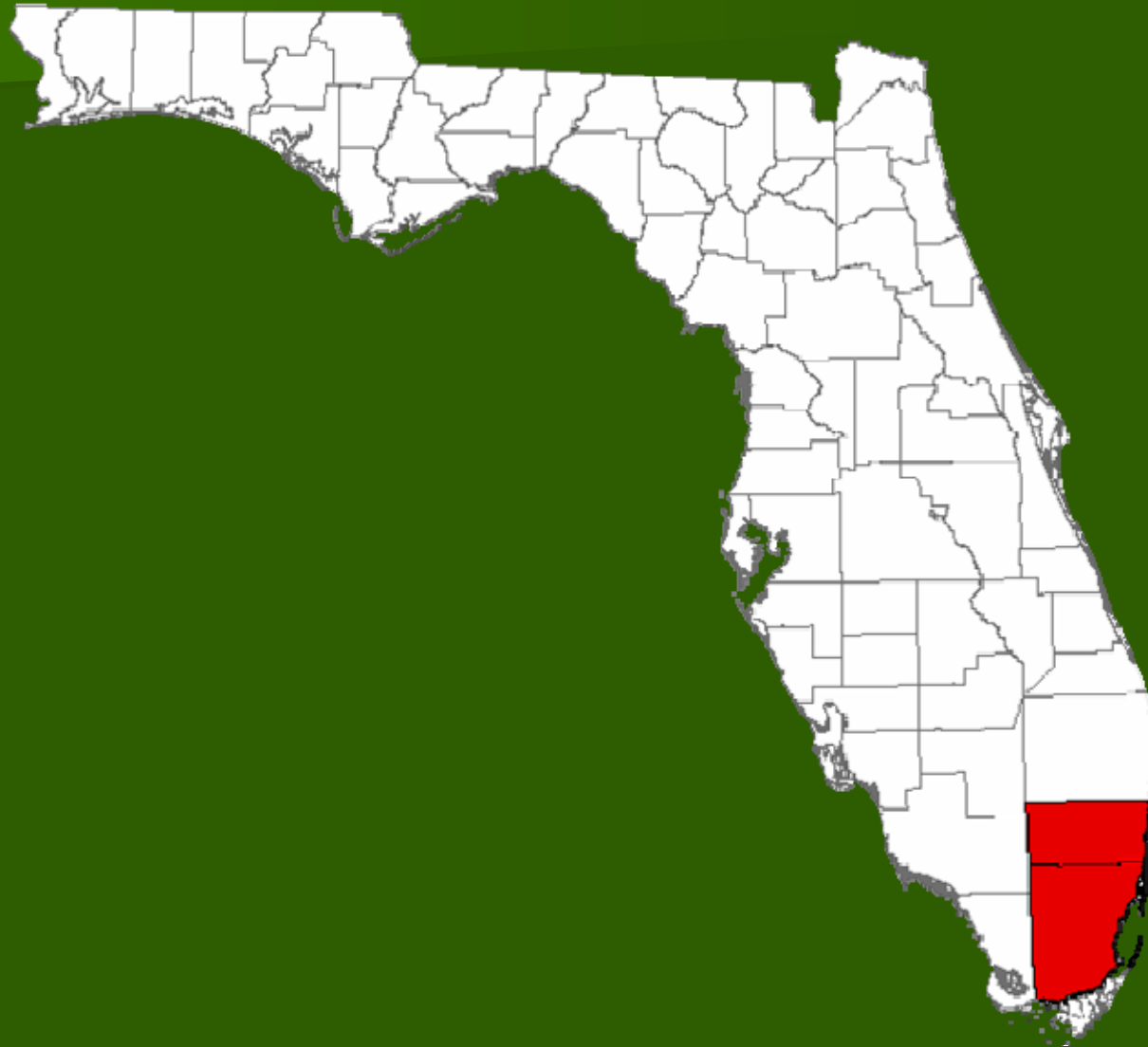
- HLB was first confirmed in Florida in August, 2005 in Miami-Dade County.



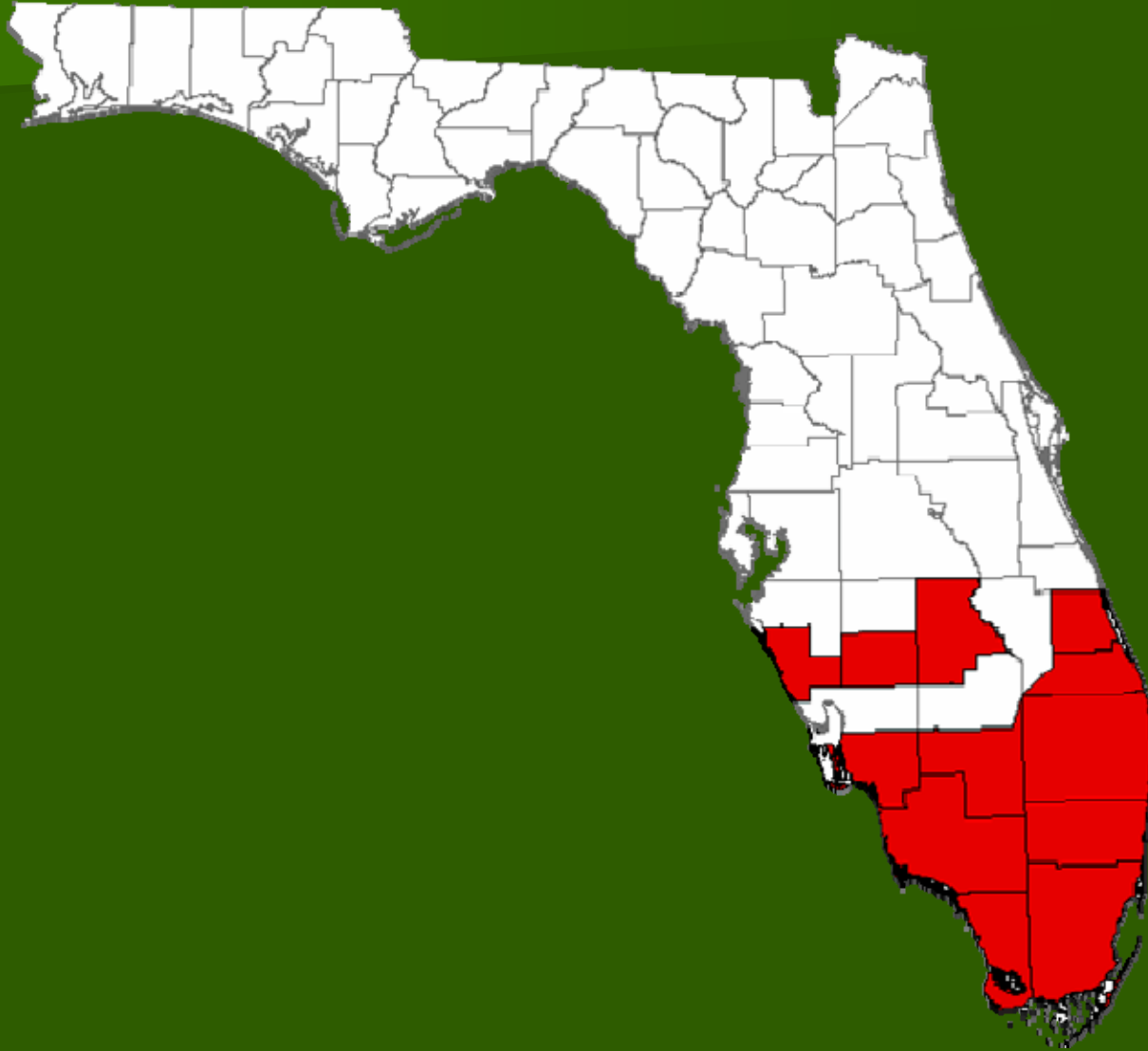
*Photo courtesy of David Hall, USDA-ARS,  
Ft. Pierce , FL*

- Neither the Asian Citrus Psyllid nor the HLB bacterium are native to Florida.
- Experts believe it probably entered Florida through a south Florida port of entry in similar fashion to Citrus Canker, another disease that continues to affect our industry.

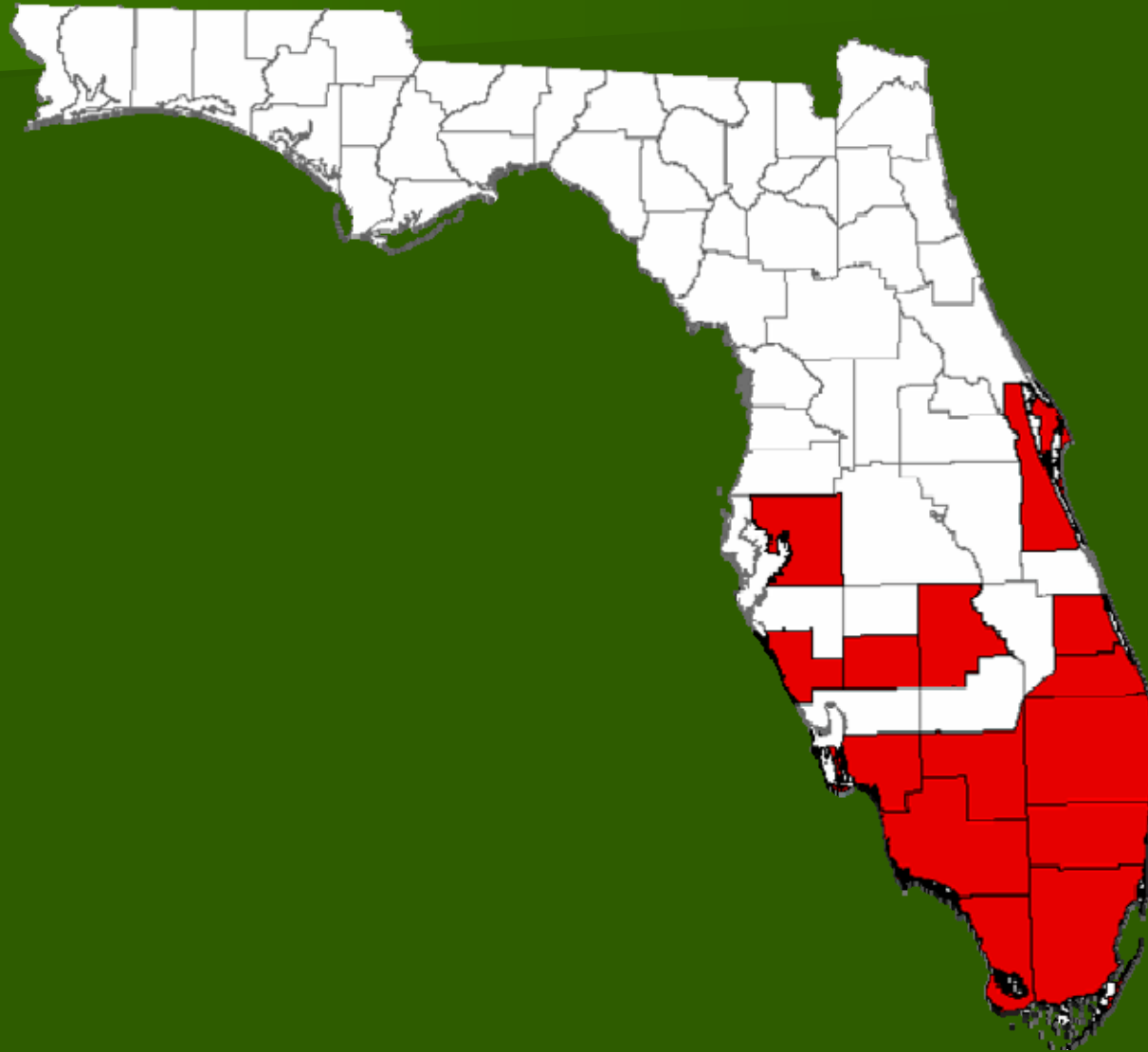
October 2005



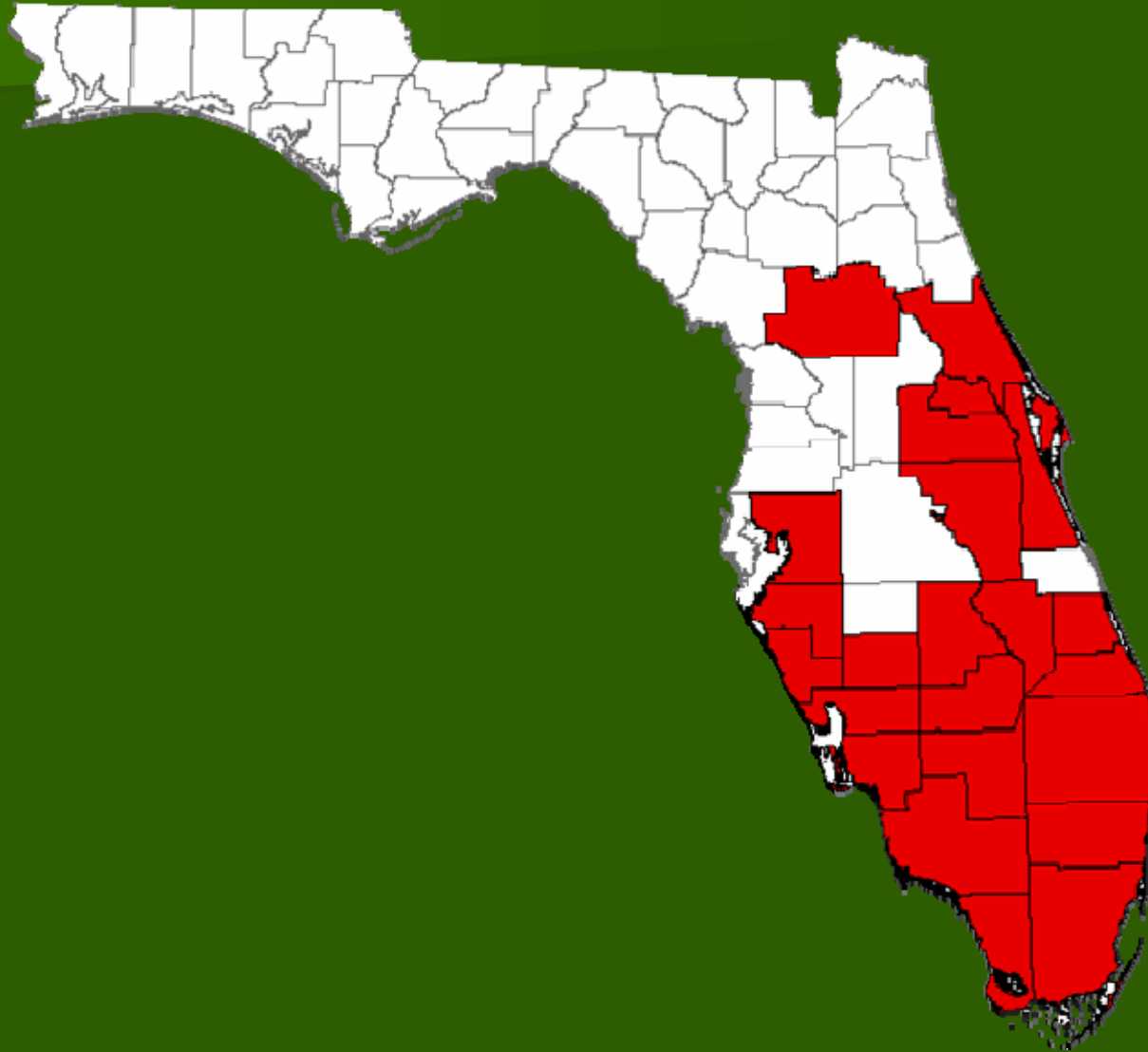
April 2006



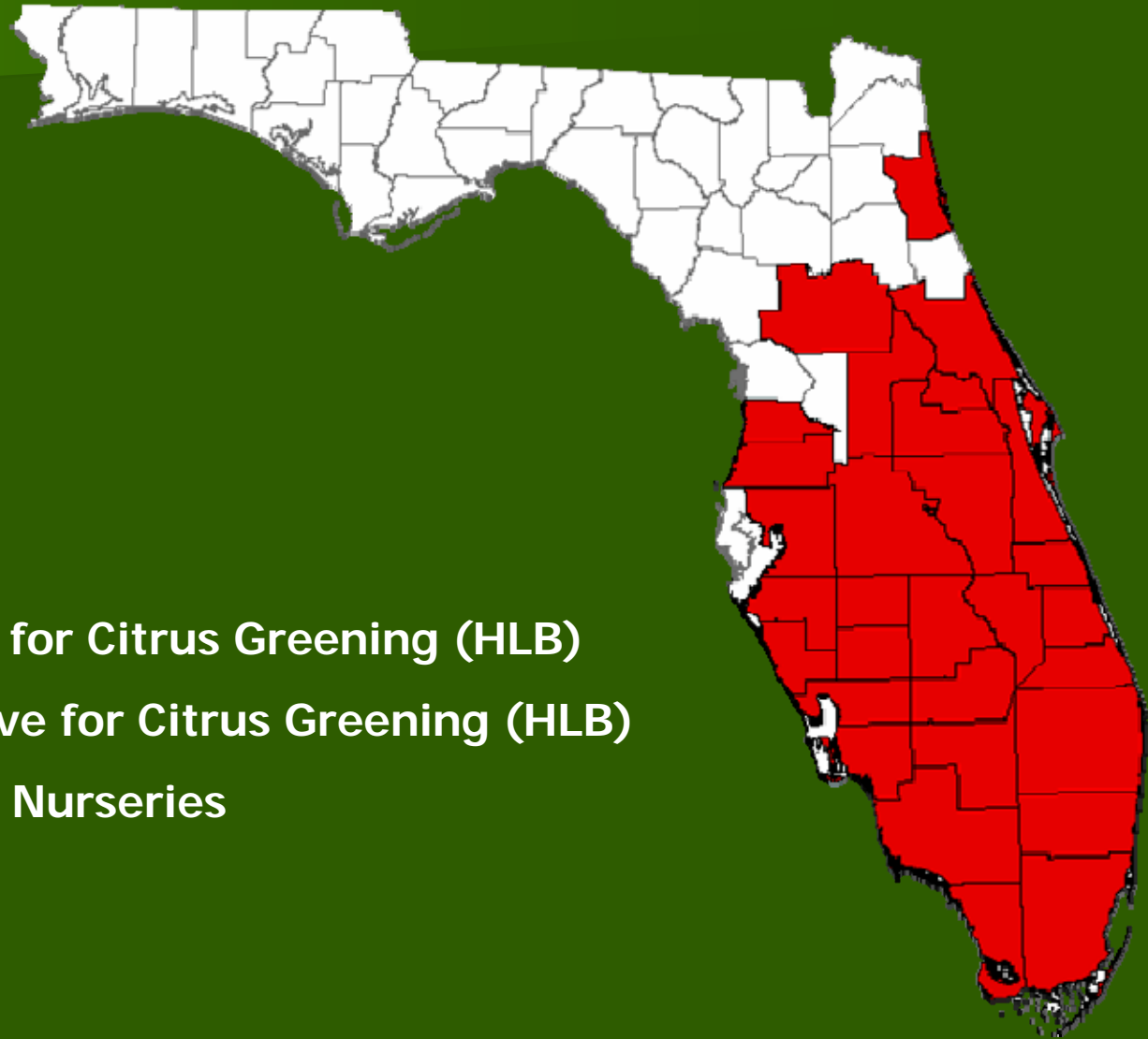
January 2007



June 2007



# February 2008



**32 Counties Positive for Citrus Greening (HLB)**

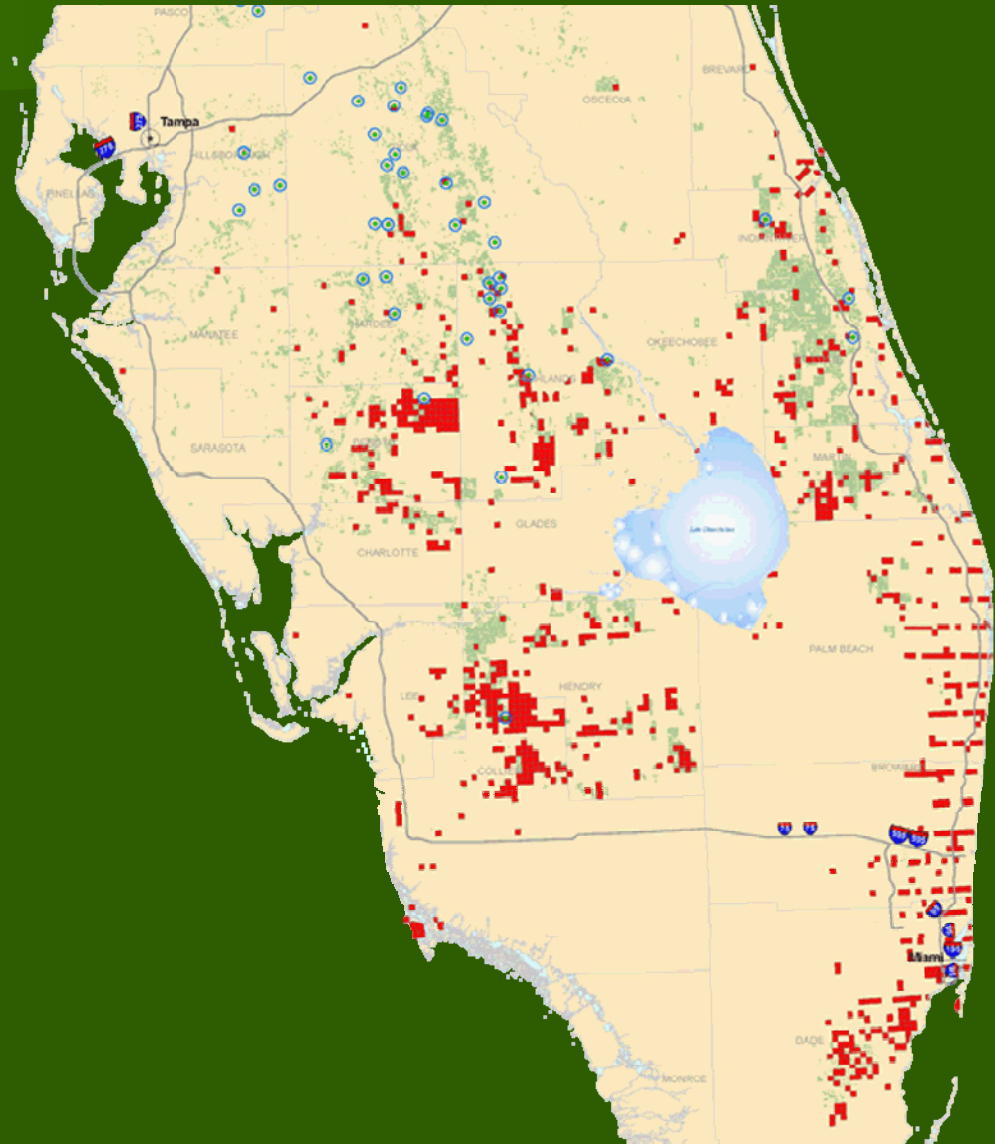
**1028 Sections Positive for Citrus Greening (HLB)**

**51 Registered Citrus Nurseries**

# Present

## Legend

- Major Cities
- Citrus nursery Locations
- Citrus Nursery One Mile Buffer
- Sections Positive For Citrus Greening (HLB)
- Commercial Citrus Production Areas
- Interstates



# Current Defenses

- Growers are fighting HLB by removing infected trees and replacing them with nursery trees grown under the USDA and FL Dept. of Ag's Citrus Health Response Program (CHRP). They are also suppressing the Psyllid with pesticides.
- Right now this is the **ONLY** strategy to slow the onset and spread of HLB. All of these actions are voluntary.

# Grower Observations

- Growers are worried.
- John Smoak of Lake Placid is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation grower. His family's citrus and cattle operations are located in Highlands and Hardee counties. They grow 3000+ acres of citrus for processing into orange juice.
- A grove with a 5% infection rate can go from 20% to 40% to 80% over a four year period.

# Economic Impact

- Scouting for the disease, tree removal and better nutrient management are increasing growers' costs at a time when fruit prices are declining and other input costs (Diesel & Fertilizer) are at all-time highs.
- The added HLB costs alone have increased grove expenses on average about 50%, from \$1,000 per acre per year to nearly \$1,500 per acre per year.
- Plus the loss of infected trees from productive groves and, in some cases, removal of entire groves due to disease are devastating large, medium and small citrus businesses.
- The spread of this disease is putting the state's \$9.3 billion citrus industry, the ancillary businesses that rely on it and 76,000 jobs at risk.

# Research

- The Florida citrus industry has made a significant financial commitment to researching additional ways to stop, or cure, the disease.
- More than 100 research projects are currently underway creating a “Manhattan Project” effort within the citrus research community.
- Unfortunately there is limited basic research on the HLB bacterium and the citrus psyllid so scientists are effectively starting from Square One.
- We believe that the brightest and best scientists at USDA and UF/IFAS researching this disease will eventually pay dividends.
- The ultimate solution is developing a tree resistant to HLB, but short term solutions may involve a biological control or new pesticide application techniques.

# Funding

- The industry is undertaking a collective effort to identify every source of funding possible at the grower, state and federal level.
- For the HLB research to remain timely and consistent, it must be ramped-up and continue unabated.
- Through federal and state legislative appropriations and industry matching funds, the research effort was able to garner about \$7.5 million last year.
- This year, Florida Citrus Mutual is seeking to secure more than \$40 million in federal funds to help support HLB and canker research. This will be matched by state legislative appropriations as well as funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Mutual has also advocated putting \$20 million in grower dollars toward this research effort this year.

# Future

- The disease is likely to spread similarly if introduced into other citrus producing states such as California, Texas and Arizona (the psyllid has been found in Mexico) and thus the potential impact to the entire US citrus industry is even greater.
- There is no doubt HLB has the ability to devastate the Florida citrus industry if we don't find solutions quickly. Economic models suggest we have a five-year window to solve this challenge.
- Loss of the domestic supply of citrus would be bad for U.S. consumers.
- Thousands of citrus farm families, such as the Smoaks and their way of life are at risk. Florida's signature industry has provided a back bone to communities across the state for many generations.
- Florida citrus growers need your partnership and leadership at this critical time.

# Questions?

**Dr. Harold Browning**  
Director of the UF/IFAS Citrus Research and  
Education Center, Lake Alfred, FL.

**Richard Gaskalla**  
Director of the Division of Plant Industry,  
Florida Department of Agriculture,  
Gainesville, FL.

