USDA: New Farm Bill Funds Available For Citrus Greening Fight

June 16, 2014

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the availability of $25 million in funding for research and Cooperative Extension Service projects to combat citrus greening (aka, HLB). The funding comes from the 2014 Farm Bill.

USDA allocated another $6.5 million, for a total of $31.5 million, to several other projects through its Huanglongbing Multi-Agency Coordination Group (HLB MAC).

The announcement provides funding to the Citrus Disease Research and Education Program (CDRE) and is a supplement of the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI). The 2014 Farm Bill provides $25 million per year for a total of $125 million of the USDA Specialty Crop Research Initiative funding toward citrus health research over the next five years.

Because there are wide differences in the occurrence and progression of HLB among the states, there are regional as well as national priorities for CDRE. These priorities fall within four categories: 1) priorities that deal with the pathogen; 2) those that deal with the insect vector; 3) those that deal with citrus orchard production systems; and 4) those that deal with non-agricultural citrus tree owners. Priority will be given to projects that are multistate, multi-institutional, or trans-disciplinary and include clearly defined mechanisms to communicate results to producers. Successful applicants will be expected to engage stakeholders to insure solutions are commercially feasible. Projects should also include an economic analysis of the costs associated with proposed solutions. A letter of intent to apply is due to NIFA by June 27, 2014. Full applications, to be invited based on relevancy review, are due Sept.29, 2014.

Also, USDA’s HLB MAC Group announced funding allocations for three new projects to combat HLB. Edward Avalos, USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, made the announcement regarding these projects during last week’s Florida Citrus Industry Annual Conference in Bonita Springs. The first project will commit approximately $2 million to
field test antimicrobials that have shown promise in combating HLB in laboratory and greenhouse studies.

The second HLB MAC project, also funded for up to $2 million, will support the deployment of large-scale thermotherapy since studies have shown heating a tree to 120°F for approximately 48 hours can kill the HLB bacterium in the upper part of the tree, allowing the tree to regain productivity. This funding will address the challenge of identifying a quick and practical way for growers to use the technology on a large scale.

For the third project, the MAC Group is providing about $2.5 million to establish several model groves in cooperation with Florida Citrus Health Management Areas. A model grove would use best management practices—including systematic surveys, timely chemical treatments, new planting strategies, and the removal of dead and abandoned groves—so growers can produce healthy citrus crops even in the presence of HLB.