

Growers, Researchers Seek Citrus Varieties Resistant to Citrus Greening

Researchers at the University of Florida provided state citrus farmers and business owners the opportunity on Thursday to sample the fruits (literally) of their latest efforts to grow varieties of citrus that are resistant to disease.

- Feedback will help researchers decide which new varieties to go forward with
- Displays featured recently discovered fruit, juice hybrids
- Next session scheduled for Dec. 10

UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Services hosted citrus growers, packers, processors, gift-fruit shippers and others the chance to taste, feel, and smell the latest varieties they've bred at their Citrus Research and Education Center in Lake Alfred.

Mostly growers, packers, and processors filled the room Thursday, sampling more than 50 varieties. They then filled out a survey gauging their reaction to the color of the fruit, its sweetness and acidity, whether it was easy to peel and whether it had seeds.

Their feedback will help researchers from the UF/IFAS Plant Improvement Team decide which new varieties will move forward for release to the Florida citrus industry.

“Display attendees represent a wide cross-section of our industry, so we get valuable feedback on all parameters from the grove to the table, allowing us to make more intelligent decisions on which types of citrus get the green light,” said Jude Grosser, Professor of Citrus breeding and genetics at the UF/IFAS CREC.

Responding to citrus greening

The displays featured some very recently discovered fresh fruit and juice hybrids, some being shown for the first time this year, and some



from trees that appear to have a good tolerance for the citrus greening disease.

"Our industry is suffering from this disease, citrus greening, which has really clobbered the industry. We'd like to have solutions to that problem," said Dr. Fred Gmitter, another Professor of Citrus breeding at UF/IFAS.

Pink and red grapefruit and grapefruit-like hybrids were also on display, as well as juices for participants to taste.

Deeley Hunt of Lake Wales described what he was looking for while tasting the different varieties.

"A pretty piece of fruit is what draws attention and if tastes good after that, it sells itself," said Hunt. "A lot of the mandarins that are coming out now are really small, so we want something that is a little bit bigger."

Hunt said he liked many of the varieties, but needed more information on the trees before deciding whether the investment is worth planting new groves.

"Without the whole picture, the trees and everything, it's hard to say if any of them will be a winner," Hunt said. "We'll want to go look at the trees and talk about production on them. We'll see if there's a viability in the boxes per acre."

Long way to go before fruit hits stores

He said he and his brothers are hunting for a new mandarin market to grow. Citrus greening has harmed their groves.

"We're very short on tangerines and mandarins, so it's been detrimental," Hunt said. "We're trying to maintain a competitive edge."

"If we can produce better fruit ... we want to be the best in the world, so this is what it takes," he added.





The Citrus Research and Education Center holds fruit display days about four to five times a year. The researchers told us it will take three to five years before any of the varieties make it to the store shelves.

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