



# Florida’s Beleaguered Citrus Industry – At a Crossroads

**by Christine Lensing**

Senior Economist, Speciality Crops  
Knowledge Exchange Division

## Inside this Issue...

Not a Pretty Picture .....	2
Florida’s Citrus Industry – A Statistical Snapshot.....	2
Florida’s Beleaguered Citrus Industry .....	2
Industry Adaptations .....	7
Strategies for Managing the Disease.....	7
Candidate Tolerant Rootstocks .....	8
A Biotech Solution.....	9
Implications for Other U.S. Citrus- Growing Regions.....	9
Concluding Thoughts.....	10

## Key Points:

- Florida’s citrus industry is in a fight for survival. For the past decade, this industry has been under attack by a disease known to scientists as Huanglongbing (HLB), but more commonly known as citrus greening.
- First discovered in Florida in 2005, greening has had a devastating impact on Florida’s citrus industry over just the past 11 years, with citrus production falling by more than 40 percent.
- As the supply of fresh citrus has shrunk, prices have soared. Nonetheless, profitability has suffered due to the rising costs of managing greening.
- It is not only the production side of the industry that has been impacted. The effects of greening are felt across the entire citrus value chain with operations in Florida’s packinghouses and processing plants curtailed. Some operators have even shut down.
- According to some experts, 20 million new citrus trees will have to be planted in Florida over the next five years in order to support the existing infrastructure – a massive undertaking by any reckoning as it equates to roughly a third of Florida’s current tree inventory.
- With no cure for HLB currently in hand or expected anytime soon, Florida growers have developed a wide range of palliatives to help them control and limit the spread of the disease. For all, the primary objective is to lengthen the life of their existing trees.
- As the spread of the disease progressed, it became increasingly clear that the solution to the problem of greening lies, ultimately, in developing a disease-resistant tree. This can be done using either traditional plant-breeding methods or through biotech. In either case, it will be several more years before such a citrus tree is commercially available.
- Once a disease-resistant tree has been commercially developed, it will take several more years before the industry can be re-set with the new disease-resistant hybrids.