

# State Responds to Industry Requests for More Citrus Varieties

If variety is the spice of life, then Florida's citrus industry will be pleased with the enhancements the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer

Services' Division of Plant Industry (DPI) has made to the Citrus Germplasm Introduction Program (CGIP).

In 2003, ten new citrus varieties will be released from the CGIP and sent to the citrus budwood program for true-to-type testing and eventual introduction

into the Florida marketplace. Among them are two varieties of tangerines, and if they perform as expected, they will move us closer to providing the Florida citrus industry with a year-round supply of delicious, small, easy-peel fruit.

The process for ensuring that new varieties are safe for introduction is time-consuming, but essential to avoid the intrusion of harmful pests and diseases. An example of how this has happened in Florida in the past was the illegal introduction in 1975 of 'Star Ruby' grapefruit that carried the citrus ringspot virus. The budwood used to

propagate the grapefruit trees had been brought in untested from Texas. This event underscored the importance of the FDACS/DPI indexing program that is conducted in quarantine greenhouses using a protocol of therapeutic shoot-tip grafting procedures to remove any graft-transmissible pathogens that the citrus budwood might contain.

In 1976, a plant quarantine facility was constructed at DPI in Gainesville. By 1980 additional laboratory space was added and three plant pathology employees dedicated a portion of their time to "cleaning up" citrus budwood and indexing it for release to the industry. A maximum of five citrus varieties could be maintained in this facility at any one time and varietal releases amounted to an average of less than one per year. With the citrus industry's increasing requests for new varieties to meet market demands, plans were undertaken to expand facilities to increase capacity for new variety screening. In 1997, plans to build a standalone citrus indexing facility composed of three greenhouses and an adjoining office were completed. However, insufficient state funding was hindering completion of the facility.



*CGIP Manager Lisa Williams (left) and Dr. Wayne Dixon, DPI Bureau Chief of Entomology, Nematology & Plant Pathology, inside one of the program greenhouses.*



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[www.doacs.state.fl.us/~pi](http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/~pi)

Determined to find a solution, DPI hired its own independent contractor to select subcontractors to oversee the construction which was then completed in a timely manner and within budget.

The new 3,410 square foot CGIP facility was dedicated in 1999 and represents a 300% increase in space for the program. Today it is staffed by two full-time and two part-time plant pathology employees. Recent and proposed program enhancements include the addition of two new growth chambers (June 2003) which will increase thermotherapy capabilities fivefold and lighting

improvements to increase plant growth potential.

As the program continues to grow, so will the number of new varieties released each year. DPI plans to introduce an average of

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10 to 12 new varieties each year to add to the inventory of Florida’s vibrant citrus industry. New candidate citrus varieties for the program will come from industry recommendations that will in turn be approved by the industry-led Citrus Budwood Protection Committee.

It is important for DPI to maintain this commitment to

ensure the viability and competitive edge of the citrus industry; it is also important for the citrus industry to do their part in protecting the health of citrus germplasm by ensuring that no budwood is introduced into the state without going through the safe and appropriate channels. Together, Florida’s abundant citrus industry will continue to flourish.

For more information about the new citrus variety introduction program, please contact Denise Feiber, APR, FDACS/DPI public information director, 352/372-3505 x102, feiberd@doacs.state.fl.us

*CGIP staff in front of DPI greenhouse complex. L-R: lab technician Carol Scoates, CGIP manager Lisa Williams, ENPP bureau chief Dr. Wayne Dixon, plant pathologist Mark Gooch, and lab technician Josh Emerson.*



**DPI Citrus Germplasm Introduction Program Complex**