

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE
U.S. INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMISSION
CERTAIN ORANGE JUICE FROM BRAZIL
January 24, 2012**

Michael W. Sparks

Good afternoon, Madam Chairman and members of the Commission, my name is Michael Sparks. I am the Executive Vice President of Florida Citrus Mutual, the state's largest citrus trade association representing approximately 8,000 Florida citrus growers.

Many Florida citrus growers are small, farming 100 acres or less, but a few are as large as 20,000 acres. Over the years, Florida citrus has weathered challenges created by Mother Nature, *i.e.* freezes, hurricanes and invasive pests and disease. However, nothing has equaled the challenge we face currently in Florida, as well as Texas and California, with citrus greening.

Huanglongbing (HLB), or citrus greening, is the most destructive citrus disease on the planet. It is spread by the Asian citrus psyllid, a small insect which was first reported in Florida in 1998. HLB attacks the tree and can kill it in less than two years. It was confirmed in 2005 south of Lake Okeechobee and quickly spread through the rest of the state. Today it has been confirmed in all 32 commercial citrus producing counties in Florida. It is also present to varying extents in Brazil, Mexico and Asia.

Research primarily from the U. S. Department of Agriculture as well as the University of Florida has uncovered ways to slow the spread of HLB in our groves but so far, there is no cure.

Researchers have recommended increased grove scouting to find the disease. That is the first step. If the grove has a low level of infection, research strongly suggests tree removal. This must be coupled with aggressively managing the psyllid through coordinated spraying by neighboring growers. But there is a real concern about the psyllid's ability to become resistant to pesticides. Any replacements for infected trees must be clean stock, which is expensive.

In addition to tree removal, many Florida citrus growers are giving trees added nutrition to put off the symptoms of HLB, but this is a short term solution to a long term problem.

Life with HLB is expensive. A full-blown psyllid management program coupled with tree removal can add up to 50% to current production costs reaching a total of \$1,500 per acre. Nutritional treatment can add up to an additional \$500 per acre depending on what inputs are utilized.

Simply implementing an aggressive psyllid control program can cost anywhere from \$14 to \$50 an acre. Some growers are spraying a minimum of two

times a year in the spring and fall. Some are spraying up to 12 times a year, at significant cost. Psyllid control treatments must be in full compliance with local, state, and federal rules covering agricultural chemical applications.

In addition, the cost of clean replacement trees has also gone up materially from prior years. There is a heavily regulated program by the State of Florida to ensure disease free resets. Nurseries must be screened, plants potted and security steps taken. As a result, new trees now cost \$9-\$10, up from \$5 four years ago.

Research institutions in Florida and California have made HLB research a priority, and USDA has placed an emphasis on understanding the psyllid and disease. More than 100 research projects are currently underway worldwide. It is truly our Manhattan Project.

The Florida citrus industry has generated additional funding by redirecting our self-assessed marketing dollars to HLB research. Not surprisingly, less advertising has reduced demand, but we know if we do not beat HLB we will not have a crop to market. Growers have financed more than \$50 million in research over the past five years, and there have been some generous private donations. We have shared the benefits of that research with citrus producers around the world, including those in Brazil.

Florida citrus is still a significant economic engine. Florida citrus' annual economic impact totals \$9 billion while creating 76,000 jobs. Nonetheless, the increased production costs associated with disease management and decreased acreage weigh heavily on our growers. The University of Florida has calculated that HLB has already cost our industry \$3.6 billion in economic activity over the past five years as well as 6,600 jobs.

Even faced with the threat of HLB, Florida citrus growers have replanted 13 million trees in the last five years, which is a testament to growers' perseverance and faith in the current research.

During this fragile era in the history of the great Florida citrus industry, it is critically important that Brazil does not return to the market with unfairly low priced juice, undercutting the profits needed to finance this effort. The existing dumping order must remain in place to maintain discipline to the marketplace.