

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

John Barben

Good morning Madame Chairman and members of the Commission. My name is John Barben and I am Vice President of Robert J. Barben, Inc., a fourth generation family citrus business. The business was founded in 1918 by my great-grandfather, who bought land which was cleared by hand, where he planted his first orange grove. The corporation is now owned by my mother and father, my two brothers and me, all of us involved in the daily operation of the business. The company owns 763 acres, of which 705 acres are round oranges. We also manage another 617 acres of round oranges, a total of 1380 acres. We grow our own nursery trees and my older brother and I own a harvesting company, which handles just under 2 million boxes a year.

Our family business has succeeded the old fashioned way: avoiding debt. Our management strategy is to never hold back on cultural practices, give the tree what it needs and in return it will give you the most it has to give. So even when we lost money with low prices, we had healthy trees and good crops when the market returned.

It seems like we have always had a threat to our existence. When I was a kid, it was the burrowing nematode. We developed better rootstocks which were less susceptible, and we survived. Later, we had the leaf miner, to which we also adapted. Next we had canker return to our state. In 1995 it was discovered in the Miami area and an eradication program was initiated which removed infected trees and those within a 1900 ft radius. Before that program was ended in 2006, 87,500 acres of commercial citrus were removed and 4.3 million nursery trees were destroyed. This past year canker spread through most of our groves, and costly spraying will be needed from April through July every 21 days. We will survive.

Now we face a challenge which dwarfs past problems. In August 2005, citrus greening was discovered in yet again, the Miami area. Scientific surveys of the area concluded that eradication was already unfeasible. Citrus growers were advised that we should survey our groves and remove infected trees. Our family did this for three years when the percentage of infected trees was less than 5%. As the percentages rose, we had to stop the removal process. In 2006 to 2008 we spent an additional \$100 per acre just to survey our groves and then the additional cost of removing the infected trees of \$7 - \$8/ tree, not counting the lost fruit revenue. We also started spraying for the psyllids, which is the vector for

the disease. Our spraying program has increased from 3-4 per year in 2005, to 11 in 2011, including both ground and aerial sprays, for psyllids, other pests, nutritional supplements and fertilizer.

The cost to fight citrus greening has almost doubled our caretaking cost since 2005, from an average of \$1200/acre to \$2067 for the past 4 growing seasons. Due to a very aggressive reset program, we are trying to keep young trees coming to replace the trees removed that are no longer viable. The resets now are more costly because they require additional hand spraying to control psyllids.

The Florida Citrus Industry is currently taxing itself through a research box tax and diverting industry marketing dollars, to help find a cure to this disease. I truly believe that the industry will survive despite canker, hurricanes, greening, labor issues, and higher input costs. As farmers, we deal with Mother Nature and risk, even one as potentially devastating as greening. But we must always balance the cost of these battles against other factors that erode our revenues. Unfairly cheap imports can undercut the base fruit price we need to cover this doubled cost. For the first time, we have even invested in another crop, blueberries, to diversify in the face of this risk.

My 4 and 7 yr old sons tell me they want to grow oranges like their dad every time they go to the groves with me, just like I did as a boy. But for that to happen, citrus growers must get a fair price for their product and not be at the mercy of dumped imports that reduce our returns. Brazilian-owned processors have been good to us recently in handling our fruit, but if their parent companies unload cheap product here as their output grows and our demand falls, we won't be able to afford the extra costs, and we will all suffer as a global industry. The antidumping order has prevented that and I'm here to today to ask you to keep it in place. My sons are not dreaming of being blueberry growers.