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FLORIDA GROWERS FUND \$10.8 MILLION IN CITRUS DISEASE RESEARCH

LAKELAND, Fla. (February 24, 2009) On behalf of citrus growers, the Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC) signed the initial round of contracts to begin funding \$10.8 million in promising citrus disease research projects which could yield solutions to greening and other diseases that threaten the future of the citrus industry. The thirty-seven contracts signed today will initiate the process and fund research through the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

“These contracts close the loop on the Florida Citrus Commission’s long-held commitment to provide necessary citrus disease research funding in a timely and accountable manner,” commented Ken Keck, FDOC executive director. “Over the past year, we have worked closely with the entire citrus industry to address this urgent need,” he added.

After an extensive, independent peer review process of more than 200 proposals, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and the Florida Citrus Production Research Advisory Council (FCPRAC) recommended 83 citrus disease research proposals for funding. FDOC will fund 70 research projects. The remaining 13 contracts, representing \$2.8 million, will be funded by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

“The Florida scientific community includes preeminent citrus experts and we are pleased that 54 percent of the research dollars will remain in the state to fund 37 projects at the University of Florida,” said Bob Norberg, FDOC deputy executive director, research and operations. “We believe that Florida researchers possess the capabilities to identify solutions to greening.”

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Scientists will be required to post quarterly progress reports at www.FCPRAC.com to ensure adequate progress and to provide access to industry stakeholders. Initial research progress reports should be available in June 2009. Almost all of the research projects will take several years to complete. Status reports will be used by program management to justify continued funding in future years.

“Today’s distribution of research dollars is an important milestone to efficiently and effectively identify actionable steps to control and eliminate greening. Through this process, we will help to preserve the economic viability of the Florida citrus industry,” Keck concluded.

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The Florida Department of Citrus is an executive agency of Florida government charged with the marketing, research and regulation of the Florida citrus industry. Its activities are funded by a tax paid by growers on each box of citrus that moves through commercial channels. The industry employs more than 76,000 people, provides a \$9.3 billion annual impact to the state, and contributes hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenues that help support Florida’s schools, roads and health care services. For more information about the Florida Department of Citrus, please visit www.floridajuice.com.