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## AGRICULTURE

# Researchers to seek \$50 million to develop canker-resistant citrus

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A University of Florida official said Friday researchers plan to ask Congress for \$50 million to pursue genetic research in citrus, with an eye toward creating tree varieties that can resist canker.

"We think we can accelerate development of resistant varieties," said Jimmy Cheek, senior vice president of agriculture and natural resources at UF. "It would be a good investment from the federal government's perspective."

The research program would last 10 years and cost \$5 million annually.

The Florida Department of Agriculture said Jan. 11 it no longer would remove healthy trees in the battle against citrus canker, which debilitates orange, grapefruit and other trees. The announcement followed the U.S. Department of Agriculture's refusal to provide further funds for canker eradication. The eradication program, which led to the destruction of more than 11 million backyard and grove trees, was declared a failure after projections that Hurricane Wilma had spread the bacterium over a much larger area. The 10-year fight cost state and federal taxpayers more than \$875 million.

Cheek said it would take at least 10 to 12 years to develop a resistant variety, do all the testing on fruit quality and other issues, and begin growing it. "Our overall goal is minimizing the impact canker and other diseases have on Florida's citrus industry," he said.

UF experts are working with the state and federal governments and the citrus industry to develop a statewide management plan, said Harold Browning, statewide coordinator for the school's citrus programs.

"We have been collaborating with citrus researchers in South America for the past 30 years, and we will try some of their canker-suppression strategies," Browning said in a statement released Friday. Those include a combination of windbreaks, copper-based canker sprays and decontamination procedures for workers and equipment.