Arizona Cooperative Citrus Registration-Certification Program Anticipates Increased Activity

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Abstract

Activity under the Arizona Cooperative Citrus Registration-Certification Program was at a new low during 1984 and 1985; no trees were budded under the program during that period. However, increased budding and bud sales during 1986 herald increased activity in the future. Because the program has continued to receive the support of the citrus industry, services have been provided uninterrupted. The program continues to maintain the foundation blocks insuring the industry with sources of budwood that have successfully met all requirements for: 1) freedom from known viruses or virus-like disorders, 2) freedom from injurious pests and diseases, and 3) trueness to horticultural type.

Introduction

The Arizona Cooperative Citrus Registration-Certification Program was founded in 1964 as a result of several years of planning by far- sighted individuals in the citrus industry who saw the damage being done by virus diseases and virus-like disorders and realized the advantages of having virus-free lines available. Because the program was in place during the period of the large expansion of the citrus acreage on the Yuma Mesa and in the Wellton-Mohawk area, most of the acreage of citrus in Yuma County is virus-free.

Materials and Methods

The primary sources of budwood under the program are foundation block trees, which are maintained by the program, and Parent or Mother Block trees, which are owned by participating nurseries. Most of these trees have been tested and found free of the viruses (or virus-like organisms) causing tristeza, seedling yellows, psorosis, vein enation, exocortis, yellow vein, tatterleaf and xyloporosis. Some trees do not have tests completed for xyloporosis and are tagged as RL to warn against budding on susceptible rootstocks. A few trees in the program have been accepted with exocortis. These are tagged RE and again may not be budded to susceptible rootstocks.

Participation in the program is voluntary; but those nurseries choosing to grow certified nursery stock must follow strict rules and regulations. These rules are enforced by the Arizona Commission of Agriculture and Horticulture (ACAH), one of three agencies cooperating to operate the program. The other two are the Arizona Crop Improvement Association, Inc., which performs the administrative and certifying activities, and the University of Arizona, which supplies advisory and technical assistance. The citrus industry guides the program and dictates policy through the Arizona Citrus Advisory Council, which also serves as the Citrus Commodity Committee of the Arizona Crop Improvement Association.

When a participating nursery has obtained budwood from a certified source, an inspector from the ACAH must be present to map out the area where the buds are placed, indicating the rootstock and number of buds used. The inspector gives a copy of this map to the program manager who also maintains a copy for future reference. ACAH inspectors survey the nursery at least every 6 months for insect and disease pests. If anything is found that would

adversely effect the certification of the trees, the program manager is immediately notified. If phytophthora infection is found, the block is removed from the program. When the eligible trees are large enough to be tagged for certification, the ACAH inspector is again present to see that the correct tags are placed on the trees as they were originally mapped. Only those trees carrying the blue certification tag can be sold as certified.

Results and Discussion

The program has distributed nearly 1,300,000 citrus buds since its beginning 22 years ago. More than 3,525,000 registered buds have been propagated under the program during this period. Most trees produced have been planted in Arizona. For this reason, the majority of the citrus trees now growing in the state are virus-free.

This year, through November 1, 25,537 buds have been distributed and 38,425 registered buds have been used under the program. This represents a marked comeback for the program compared to the previous 2 years. This is expected to continue during the immediate future, with tag sales also expected to increase.

Revenues generated by the program still fall short of the budget required to operate it. However, through a contract with the Yuma County Citrus Pest Control District, the program has been able to continue.

One of the pests that the district endeavors to exclude is tristeza. During the 1950's and 1960's, the Yuma County citrus industry spent a considerable amount of time and money in removing all of the Meyer lemon and other trees carrying the tristeza virus from the area. To maintain this tristeza-free state, the district and the program have developed a mutually benefiting relationship. The two organizations share the same manager, office, and cost of administration. Through this cooperation, both the program and the district have been able to maintain their services at minimal costs to each.

Arizona has been fortunate in being able to maintain its citrus certification program at a time when only California continues to operate one; it is not as comprehensive as the one operated here. Farmers and home owners buying citrus trees should support the program by insisting on trees bearing the official blue certification tag. This will not only assist the program financially, but the grower also can be assured that the trees are free of the virus diseases that they have been indexed for and that they are the variety and rootstock designated on the tag.