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Citrus Industry

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Douglas A. Holmberg (Ci)

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Douglas Holmberg

Holmberg Farms uses budwood increase blocks to guard against tristeza

By Mariann Holland

"Vision is the name of the game," says Douglas Holmberg of Holmberg Farms in Hillsborough County. A vision of producing top-quality, fast-growing, disease-free citrus trees has shaped Holmberg's nursery practices for years.

"The trees we produce for growers could yield profitable crops for several generations of the same family if we do our part right. I grew up on a farm and learned from my father to do replicated tests and to appreciate the advice and recommendations of the extension service and department of agriculture," he says. "When their advice was that the best tree is a disease-free tree, I took it seriously." In 1975 Holmberg began growing a budwood increase block with budwood from the DPI shadehouse indexed to be tristeza negative as his primary budwood source for his citrus nursery. "The increase block raises the odds of producing a citrus tristeza virus-free tree to about 90+ percent—much higher odds than trees budded with wood from a traditional budwood block and now we can inoculate with a mild strain of tristeza for maximum protection," he said.

The trees in an increase block are used to cut budwood for only one to two years, then they are put in containers and sold for dooryard use. Since they are in the nursery for a short period of time and are sprayed regularly, they are much less likely to have aphid-transmitted citrus tristeza virus than standard mature budwood trees that remain in a scion grove setting for years and years, "and we are virtually assured that we will have no other virus diseases either."

Holmberg developed the increase block concept on his own. "Then when I found it was a standard practice in California, I felt like I had reinvented the wheel," he said. In recent years, several other Florida citrus nurseries have begun using budwood increase blocks, largely in response to the rapid spread of tristeza in Florida groves and the inclusion of this budwood source in the budwood registration program.

Commenting on the current price situation in the industry, Holmberg said, "We're selling trees for a lot less money for the same reason citrus growers are selling their product for less. It's all a matter of supply and demand. Is the quality down? Do

packers accept lower quality fruit when volume is up? Absolutely not."

Holmberg recently relocated his nursery operation, putting the citrus greenhouses at Holmberg Farms, a 140 acre site with 115 acres devoted to woody ornamentals and 25 acres to citrus.

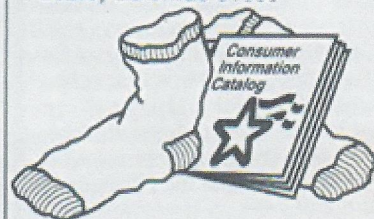
Holmberg believes that citrus growers are far-sighted because of the long term crop they grow, "and folks involved in growing a crop of this nature have more stability. I haven't had but three bad checks from citrus growers in 30 years. There is no one we do business with that I have a higher regard for than citrus growers." ■

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