

TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY - KINGSVILLE

# CITRUS CENTER

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February 2005

## NEWSLETTER

Vol.23 No.1

### DR AMADOR STEPS DOWN AS CENTER DIRECTOR

Dr Jose Amador, Director of both the Agricultural Research and Extension Center and the Citrus Center, stepped down January 15, although he retains the title of Center Director until his retirement on August 31 this year. He is now on developmental leave to strengthen links with Monterrey Tech in Mexico and EARTH University in Costa Rica. Dr Amador was appointed Director of both Centers in 1991, and strove to improve cooperation between them. Clearly, from the evidence one sees of the many instances of joint programs and collaboration between all the units, he was highly successful, while at the same time ensuring that each maintained its own identity.

Dr Amador was already at the Center when he was appointed director. He first came to Weslaco as Extension Plant Pathologist in 1965, and served in this capacity until he was appointed as the Director. He will thus have completed 40 years of service this summer. He spent a year in Washington, D.C. as USDA Assistant Secretary, appointed by President Clinton.

A search committee has been appointed to recommend a replacement for Dr Amador. During the pe-

riod January to August, the Deputy Center Director, John da Graca, will be the Interim Center Director.

Faculty, staff & students express their appreciation to Dr. Amador for his leadership and support over the years.

### JOSE AMADOR RECEIVES POTTS AWARD

Dr Jose Amador, Center Director of the Weslaco Center since 1991, and extension plant pathologist for 16 years before that, became the 51st recipient of the Arthur T. Potts Award at the annual meeting of the Rio Grande Valley Horticultural Society held at the Experiment Station in January 2005. In presenting the award, the chairman of the awards committee, Dr Bob Wiedenfeld said "As an extension pathologist and as an administrator no one has done more for the vegetable, citrus and ornamental industries in the Rio Grande Valley than Jose. He is a people person and this, probably more than anything else, has been the formula for success in his career." Wiedenfeld cited a few of Jose's many awards and accomplishments, including the A & M Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence and his appointment as USDA Assistant Secretary for Science and Education.

Jose's wife Silvia and other members of his family were present to see him receive the award. In accepting it, an emotional Dr Amador said "Getting this award means a lot to me. I've spent 40 years in this place, and they've been 40 very, very happy years. I love this place." He gave thanks to "the many people who brought me to this dance. I accept the award, not in my name, but in the name of all the people who work in this location".

Congratulations, Jose, from everyone.

**Rod Santa Ana**  
Communications Specialist



Family members with Dr. Amador include (left to right) his daughter-in-law, Jennifer; wife Silvia; son Danny; and grandson Kailer

## THE WHITE CHRISTMAS OF 2004

On Christmas Eve, snow fell in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and people woke up to a White Christmas. Although snowflakes have been seen occasionally in the Valley, snow-covered ground is rare; Brownsville last recorded it 109 years ago. So, it was indeed a big surprise to see snow on our citrus trees. It gradually melted as the day went on, and it appears that fruit damage did not occur. An extensive search by Dr Julian Sauls found only two Valencia fruit, both from the tops of young trees, with some internal damage.

The reason why there was not severe freeze damage appears to be because temperatures were not cold enough for long enough. At the Citrus Center temperatures were around 31/32°F from 7:30 on Christmas Eve through the night, dropping to 26-28°F at 7 am.

Quite a lot of subsequent leaf drop has been observed, and closer examination indicates that these leaves were ones already suffering damage from greasy spot, insect or mite feeding, or some other injury. What effect this may have on fruit size of the remaining crop, and next season's bloom and production remains to be seen.

Next snow fall expected round about 2113!!



J. Victor French & John da Graca

## AGRICULTURE IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY: CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Last month, Dr. John Robinson of Texas Cooperative Extension and I delivered the keynote address at the 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Institute of the Rio Grand Valley Horticultural Society in Weslaco, Texas. The following is the essence of the address. The response we received prompted me to write this article and we were requested to post a copy of our presentation on the internet.

People like myself, that have lived here for more than a decade are aware that the Valley is a rapidly growing area. The population in the Valley has experienced a quantum leap in the past three or four decades. Modern Valley agriculture was born alongside the irrigation canals (106 years-old) and the arrival of the railroad (100 years-old). The Texas Agricultural Experiment Station (TAES) began 117 years ago in College Station and it introduced a branch in Weslaco about three quarter of a century ago. Today, TAES, the Texas A&M University-Kingsville Citrus Center, and the USDA agricultural laboratories provide an important role in the dissemination of new scientific knowledge and service to the agricultural clientele in the Valley. Some of the tangible products produced in the Valley are the 'Rio Red' and the 'Star Ruby' grapefruits, the 1015 onion, and the mild jalapeno pepper. It is an undocumented fact that these products have prejudiced the taste buds of the policy makers in Austin and Washington. Also, people like our ex-Congressman, Kika da la Garza and Dr. Jose Amador, Center Director, have played key roles in U.S. Agriculture policy developments in Washington, D.C. This is the legacy and the history we have, and we are proud of it. However, the future appears to be different and to be equally successful as in the past – the agricultural community (including the industry, scientists, and the policy makers) should be prepared to adjust to the changes and meet future challenges.

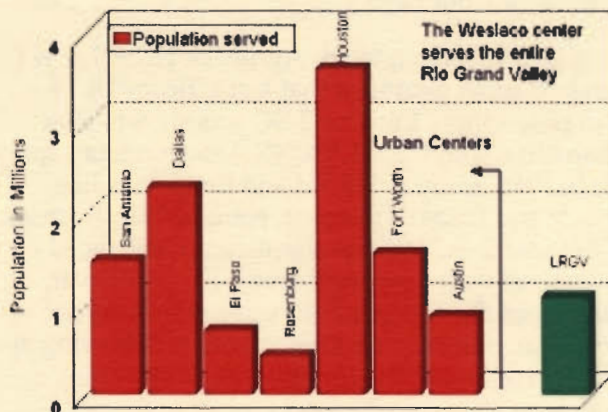
The challenges include: 1) the backbone of the economy is shifting from agriculture to retail business, construction, and human-health related industries and professions, and 2) the Valley is becoming a rapidly growing metropolitan area. In the past year, the total cost of new construction (residential and commercial) in the Valley was over \$ 1 billion! The potential value of a traditional citrus orchard in north McAllen would be on par with any upscale residential areas in the country. During my 15 years of experience in the Valley, I have noticed that the current average age of a serious citrus grower is in his 60s. There are now only a dozen or so people in their 30s or 40s that are

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skilled and knowledgeable in making money in citrus. But there always will be a niche for specialty crops, including citrus production in the Valley. It's common knowledge that the Valley produces the best grapefruit in the world. At the Citrus Center, we initiated a virus-free budwood program in the 90s to provide the commercial citrus industry with disease-free budwood. We have had produced and sold several hundreds of thousands buds. But the fact is that the majority of the buds were for dooryard citrus and not for the commercial citrus market. The year 2004 was a good one for Valley citrus and vegetable growers – most received an excellent price for their produce. However, this success was mainly the result of three hurricane misfortunes in Florida. The Valley has had four tree-killing freezes in the past 50 years. Our climate is unpredictable, as is the political environment. For example, it is very possible that a post-Fidel Castro government in Cuba may result in open trade relations with the U.S., and increased competition for grapefruit and sugar markets in this country.

Another main challenge that we have in the Valley today is coping with the needs of an urban metropolis. Four years ago, Dr. J. Victor French and I were instrumental in uncovering the presence of a very serious, economically damaging pest (the sugarcane root weevil, *Diaprepes abbreviatus*) for the first time in Texas. This devastating pest was introduced into Florida from Puerto Rico in the 1960s and it reached an upscale residential area in McAllen, TX. It is suspected that the pest was introduced on landscaping plants. This is a clear indication that the Valley should support the growing metropolitan needs, especially in the landscape industry. The number of phone calls that I have received in the past several years from home owners suggests a growing need for urban entomologists, horticulturists, and pathologists in the Valley. Similarly, numerous cases of multi-million dollar mold-related law suits settled in the Valley show a clear need for improved educational programs for an urban population.

The figure below indicates the population in counties that have an Urban Agricultural Center. The Weslaco Experiment Station that serves the Rio Grande Valley definitely qualifies to have an Urban Center. Compared to traditional agriculture, many people that represent the urban population now pick up the phone to call for help from agricultural scientists. This is an indication that the time has come in the Valley to attend equally well to the needs of home owners. This article is in no way intended to suggest that we ignore the traditional agriculture in the Valley. It is time for us to officially welcome the need of a growing urban population and the moment to build an Urban Center in the Valley.



People at one time came to the Valley looking for citrus property, today's Valley visitors are different: they include – Winter Texans, bird watchers, business people, and beauty queens (the Valley hosted numerous state, national, and Miss Universe beauty pageants in the past decade).

The time has come for a change in Valley agricultural business. An effort to build and staff an Urban Center in the Valley is inevitable. As Dr. John Robinson said "There is an economy and a clientele that are both more than 10 times the traditional agricultural community. We won't be in a position to take care of the latter if we ignore the former."

Mani Skaria

### ENVIDOR MITICIDE NEARING REGISTRATION

Envidor 2 SC Miticide (spirodiclofen), a product of Bayer CropScience, should receive registration for use on Valley citrus in early 2005. Envidor 2 SC is a selective non-systemic contact miticide that kills all mite life stages, including eggs, and has proven highly effective in trials against the citrus rust mite (CRM). First tested in 1998 as experimental BAJ 2740, it was applied by handgun sprayer on replicated single tree plots for efficacy against CRM. Thereafter, trials were mainly on replicated multiple tree plots, with Envidor evaluated at varying rates (10-20 oz/acre) and applied by commercial air blast sprayer calibrated to deliver 200-250 gal /acre. It was also tested for tank mix compatibility with NR 435 petroleum spray oil, various spray adjuvants and fungicides.

Envidor 2 SC has consistently given excellent CRM knockdown and long term control i.e., 60 days or longer. In our 2002 Citrus Trial—Envidor 2 SC at both a 10 and 13 oz / acre rate provided effective CRM control thru 77 days post-spray. In 2004—Envidor at 17 oz / acre gave control thru 70

days, in comparison to an Agri-Mek EC + 1.0 % Oil standard spray treatment that lost efficacy by 56 days post-spray. Envidor 2 SC was shown to be compatible with 0.05-2.5% NR 435 petroleum spray oil, B-1956 Spray Adjuvant and fungicides like Kocide and GEM. However, residual effectiveness of Envidor 2 SC was not significantly enhanced by tank mixes with petroleum spray oil. Moreover, throughout the course of our trials no phytotoxic effects were observed on foliage or fruit following application of any of the Envidor / tank mix spray treatments.

Envidor 2 SC will be an important and much needed addition to the miticides currently registered

and used on Valley citrus. It fits well in the Citrus Integrated Pest Control (IPM) Program and can be alternated with other miticides used by growers in their seasonal CRM spray control program. Trials are on-going to obtain additional data on efficacy of Envidor 2 SC against other important phytophagous mite species on Valley citrus—False spider mite, Texas citrus mite, and the citrus red mite. These data will be forthcoming in future Citrus Center Newsletter articles.

**J. Victor French**

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