Advancing Southeast Georgia Citrus Education Through Agent Led Projects

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Abstract

Since its introduction by the Spanish and subsequent spread throughout the United States, Georgia growers have become increasingly interested in the commercial production of citrus. There has been exponential growth in planted citrus acreage in South Georgia since the mid-2010s. Earlier plantings consisted primarily of single landscape specimens, whereas current production includes large, multi-acre commercial operations distributed throughout the region. As of 2025, an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 acres of citrus have been planted statewide.
With this rapid expansion, growers require locally relevant research to help achieve long-term financial sustainability. This need led the agent to establish a small citrus grove at the Vidalia Onion and Vegetable Research Center (VOVRC) in Lyons, Georgia. The initial plantings consisted of three varieties: Cara Cara navels, Frost Owari satsumas, and Kishu mandarins. The following year, plantings continued with 20 Sugar Belle® trees. From these plantings, subsequent citrus-related field days, production meetings, and research projects have been conducted and are ongoing. These area-wide citrus meetings have been attended by more than 240 participants, who have earned approximately 100 pesticide credit hours. Speakers have included specialists from UGA and UF, as well as local agricultural agents. Topics have included freeze protection, variety selection, disease management, and a variety of other citrus-related issues. These meetings also serve as valuable opportunities for agents to gather feedback for future research endeavors. Survey responses are collected from growers to identify priority research goals for Extension personnel.

Grove Installation

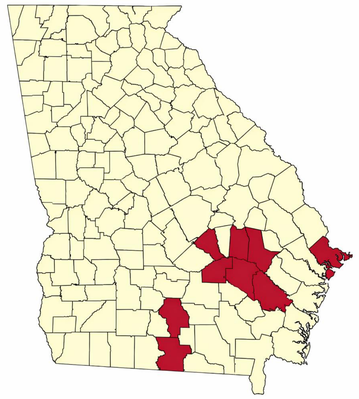
The main 2- inch irrigation line installation.

Evans/Candler ANR Agent, Ross Greene (foreground) and Aubrey Shirley Tattnall ANR Agent at the first planting in 2021.

An aerial view of the newly planted citrus trees at the VOVRC

All aspects of grove design (e.g., irrigation, layout, fittings, micro-sprinklers, etc.) were designed and installed by the agents.

Geographic Reach of Meetings



Growers from surrounding counties in Georgia including Appling, Berrien, Chatham, Lowndes, Jeff Davis, Tattnall, Toombs, Wayne, Wheeler as well as Alachua County in Florida have been represented at these meetings. Tattnall and Toombs had the highest percentage of growers present.

Citrus groves are less than 10 acres, with majority of groves being 5 years or more.

An aerial view of the attendees and citrus plots at the Southeast GA Citrus Field Day held on July 24, 2025 at the Vidalia Onion and Vegetable Research Center.

Research Projects and Outreach

Research Project

- Freeze Protection
- Irrigation Studies
- Fertilizer Studies
- Future citrus greening resistant rootstocks

Extension agents installing CropX moistures sensors in 2025.

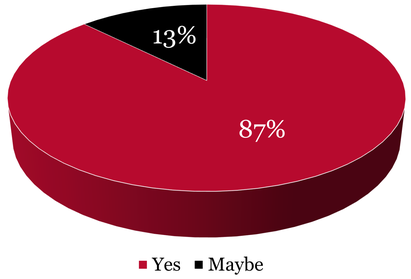
Extension Education/Outreach

- To date, the agent has held four area wide citrus related production meetings. These meetings have had specialists from University of Georgia as well as collaborations with University of Florida. Topics discussed at these meetings included: variety selection, irrigation, fertilization, citrus greening as well as other diseases, and insects.

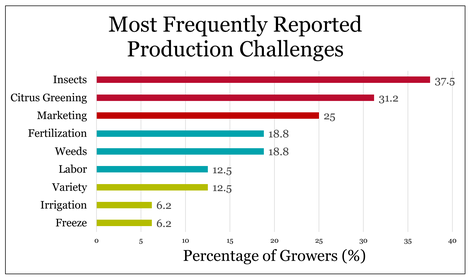
Photo 1. Agents laying out poly irrigation line. Photo 2. Irrigation manifold control valve with toro controllers and valves.

Grower Feedback/Satisfaction

A grower survey in 2025 was conducted to help give guidance on issues and problems that producers are most concerned with. As well as grower satisfaction with current programming efforts. An overwhelming (87%) of respondents stated that topics presented were relevant to their operations.



Another important topic was insects, citrus greening, and marketing. Over one-third of growers mention insects and greening to be important present challenges or future concerns. One-quarter speak to marketing being a major issue for future sustainability.



Aubrey Shirley Tattnall ANR Agent at the first citrus meeting at the VOVRC in 2021.

Extension Agent Aubrey Shirley discusses production issues with attendees at the Southeast GA Citrus Field Day held on July 24, 2025.

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