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Advancing Southeast Georgia Citrus Education Through Agent Led Projects

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Introduction and Educational Objectives

There has been exponential growth in planted citrus acreage in South Georgia since the mid-2010s. Earlier plantings consisted primarily of individual landscape specimens, whereas current production now 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. This rapid expansion created a need for locally relevant research, demonstration plantings, and Extension education focused on production challenges such as cold protection, variety selection, pest management, and the long-term viability of citrus production in Georgia.

To address this need, a citrus research and demonstration grove was established in 2021 to serve as a local platform for applied research and grower education. A startup grant of \$2,500 was secured to purchase irrigation pipe and related materials, while additional expenses were supported through Tattnall County agricultural funds. Irrigation supplies totaling approximately 850 feet was installed by the Tattnall and Evans County Extension agents to support long-term orchard management and research activities.

Following irrigation installation, sixty citrus trees representing three varieties were planted in two 300-foot rows with 10-foot spacing between trees and 25-foot spacing between rows. Varieties included Cara Cara navel oranges, Owari satsumas, and Kishu mandarins, all grafted onto Rich 16-6 trifoliolate rootstock. The grove was designed to facilitate applied research trials including irrigation management, cold hardiness evaluations, and future rootstock studies related to citrus greening.

The goal of this program is to provide a regional demonstration and research site that supports producer education, identifies priority citrus production challenges, and delivers research-based recommendations to growers across Southeast Georgia.

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



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

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.



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 moisture 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.



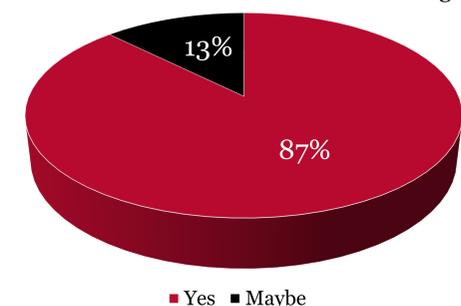
Photo 2.

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

Grower Feedback/Satisfaction

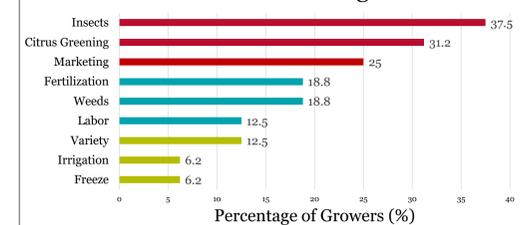
A grower survey in 2025 was conducted to help give guidance on issues and problems that producers are most concerned with. As well as grower satisfaction with current programming efforts. An overwhelming (87%) of respondents stated that topics presented were relevant to their operations.

Grower Feedback: Relevance of Meeting



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.

Most Frequently Reported Production Challenges



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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