5.5 When Should a Grower with HLB Stop Removing Trees?

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HLB was first found in Florida in late 2005 and is now widely distributed throughout the commercial citrus growing regions of Florida. Although no hard numbers are available, survey data indicate that the cumulative incidence of infected trees is in the range of 8-10% statewide. However, the estimated incidence varies across the state with the highest infection levels occurring in the south and the east coast. In some areas, infection levels within individual groves are approaching 100%; while in many other areas of the state, infection levels within individual groves remain less than 1-2%. When HLB was first discovered, the citrus industry was reasonably united in the approach that should be taken to manage the disease. The recommended practices included control of the insect vector, use of disease-free planting material, and the removal of infected trees to lower the inoculum load. However, as infection levels began to increase, many growers began looking at alternative treatments, mostly nutritional in nature; and, the HLB management decision has come down to “Should I continue to remove trees?” or “Should I switch to a nutritional program?” Unfortunately, the decision is much more complex than this and many factors, both biologic and economic, affect the decision. Factors which affect the decision include tree age at the decision point, current infection levels, estimated infection and production estimates going forward, the time horizon being evaluated, and the cost differentials between the different alternatives. A spreadsheet-based model has been developed to help growers evaluate their individual situations. Several scenarios will be presented which will illustrate when each management would be the most cost effective.