



## 2014 VEGETABLE, FRUIT & CITRUS OUTLOOK

**A look ahead to 2014 for growers  
and those serving Florida's produce markets**

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## **Labor / immigration reform will continue to be a top concern for growers.**

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Immigration reform is making progress but may not make it out of the House. The focus on Capitol Hill seems to be on replacing the H-2A program with a more viable and user-friendly option. Meanwhile, this year's large crops could present challenges if growers are unable to line up enough help. Some growers had to leave fields early due to lack of labor availability in 2013. This will likely carry into 2014 despite what happens with the immigration reform law. Growers are becoming more concerned about increasing scrutiny from immigration officials and the potential for lawsuits brought on behalf of farmworkers.

## **The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) is likely to move forward in the coming months.**

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As the deadline for implementation of the Produce Safety Rule grows closer, there is still confusion about the outcome, especially among smaller growers whose main concerns are related to water quality and natural fertilizers (manure/compost). While smaller growers may be exempt from certain provisions of the law, they still must treat food safety as a priority. For their part, growers with upright/higher-hanging fruit say some of the rules should not run indiscriminately across markets and should not apply to them.

## **Government regulators (water, chemicals, healthcare) don't seem to understand farming.**

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The federal government is perceived as not being educated enough about farming issues, and as being more imports-oriented rather than focused on domestic growers. The looming implementation of the Affordable Care Act adds another wrinkle to this perception. At the same time there are lingering Farm Bill questions; Specialty Crop Research Initiative projects appear safe, but there is still much concern over how they will be funded. Water issues are likely to settle somewhat as EPA has accepted Florida's own standards for numeric nutrient criteria in the state's waters. However, the Indian River Lagoon could be a focal point of controversy in 2014.

## **New varieties / crop shifts.**

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New varieties are being bred increasingly for postharvest qualities and consumer preferences – for example, a watermelon bred for longer shelflife in the fresh-cut market. Blueberries remain popular but they are not a novelty anymore and the market is quickly maturing. Peaches remain somewhat of a wild card as an alternative crop in Florida. In 2013, some growers had a great season and others a bad season. Those who



did not have adequate cold protection suffered even though the state had a mild winter.

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### **Florida growers feel increasing competition from Mexico.**

Crops like tomatoes and strawberries are feeling the impact of increased competition from Mexico. Peppers and other crops also might begin to feel more of this competition as well, as some acres shift away from tomatoes in Mexico due to the trade suspension agreement.

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### **Citrus / HLB / psyllid remain a major concern.**

HLB remains the central focus in Florida. Last season saw the biggest fruit drop since the 1969-1970 season, and most believe HLB was a large contributing factor. Psyllid control and enhanced nutrition programs remain the only real option for growers dealing with HLB. Also of concern are early estimates predicting another small citrus crop in 2013-2014 – in the 130-million box range.

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### **Sustainable production, new chemistries, alternatives to methyl bromide and biologicals hit the market.**

Crop protection companies are trying to get the message out on how to produce more efficiently in greater quantities with fewer resources as water becomes scarcer, ag land disappears, and the world population continues to increase. More crop protection companies are acquiring biological products or dipping into the market. The industry continues to see alternatives to methyl bromide; other products are not likely to be total replacements, so more products and practices are needed to fight soilborne pests.

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### **Bees / pollinators are endangered.**

The mainstream media increasingly is placing the blame for bee losses on pesticides, especially neonicotinoid insecticides. Crop protection companies are trying to promote their focus on bee health, while growers continue to weigh various impacts and how they can be prepared. Efforts are now being directed to better labeling of crop protection products over banning them.

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### **Weather / climate change worsen.**

Simply put, weather is becoming harder to predict, whatever its cause. In Florida, this year's wet season has brought more rain than recent previous seasons. The rains are good to fill up reservoirs, but bring with it challenges associated with growing in wet weather.

## The locally grown movement grows.

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Walmart is reemphasizing locally grown produce, and farmers markets are on the increase, according to USDA, and consumers are looking for a face to put on the produce they are buying. Is agriculture becoming cool? It would appear so, given the rise of reality shows like “Farm Kings.” Even larger growers are establishing so-called agri-tainment operations.

### ABOUT FLORIDA GROWER

*Florida Grower* serves as a top information source for specialty crop growers seeking information about production techniques, crop protection, farm management, new varieties, and more. Our readers are commercial vegetable and citrus growers as well as other allied professionals in the specialty agriculture industry.

GrowingProduce.com is the digital location to find out the latest news and trends in the fruit, vegetable, and citrus sectors. The site features relevant content from integrated, cross-market resources *Florida Grower* as well as *American Vegetable Grower* and *American/Western Fruit Grower* magazines. Featured videos, useful analysis, and opinion help round out this industry resource.

Florida Grower is based in Orlando, FL, while its corporate headquarters are located in Willoughby, OH, in the Cleveland metro area where its parent company, Meister Media Worldwide, was founded in 1932.

### ABOUT MEISTER MEDIA WORLDWIDE

Meister Media Worldwide, headquartered in Willoughby, Ohio, provides integrated media solutions for worldwide specialized agriculture. A leader in the industry, the company provides information and networking opportunities to global markets, including fruits and citrus, vegetables, cotton, ornamental horticulture, precision agriculture, plant protection, and Latin American agriculture. Founded in 1932, Meister Media Worldwide now produces 13 regular magazines, along with eNewsletters and more than 20 websites, as well as trade shows and exchange events. In addition, Meister produces custom print products, web development, videos, and strategic business development services. Contact us at [www.MeisterMedia.com](http://www.MeisterMedia.com).

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