

The Prospects of Commercial Etrog Production in South Florida, a Culturally Significant Citron

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The traditional etrog is a type of yellow Citron, *Citrus medica* L., with many uses. It also plays a role in Jewish ceremonies during the holiday of Sukkot. During this joyous week-long celebration of the agricultural harvest, people of the Jewish faith also commemorate the forty-year period during which the children of Israel are said to have wandered the Sinai desert some three thousand years ago. The Jewish population has since spread across the globe with a great many settling in Florida. The United States is home to a Jewish population of 5.7 million and 750,000 reside in Florida. South Florida has become such a popular destination that it possesses the single largest concentration of Jewish people outside of Israel. Potential for disease, insect pests, freezes, and a variety of other factors, make growing any type of citrus in south Florida a serious challenge. Etrogs grown for ceremonial purposes are even more problematic because the fruit must undergo the scrutiny of a rabbi prior to use. Defects in shape and blemishes on the skin may render the fruit useless for Sukkot but still suitable for other commercial purposes. The popularity and limited supply of etrogs for use by the faithful often results in prices ranging between \$30 to \$100 per individual fruit and upwards of \$1000 for choice specimens. With a growing Jewish population and increasing demand for the highly valued citron, there exists the potential for a locally grown supply of etrogs if commercial production challenges can be met.

