



By Carl Collen

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Florida's finger lime potential

Researchers believe the fruit could be a popular new addition to supermarket shelves



Image: UF/IFAS

A University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) researcher believes that finger limes may be the next food trend, that could continue to fortify Florida's role as a citrus producer for the world.

Manjul Dutt, a research scientist with the UF/IFAS Citrus Research and Education Center, has received funding to explore how finger limes could be grown and marketed by Florida citrus growers.

Finger limes are an oblong, finger-shaped fruit about 4 inches long with red, pink or green-yellow pulp filled with tangy juice.

They are a culinary delicacy used as garnishes for sushi, vegetables, salads and pasta, currently grown mostly in Australia, California and Hawaii, and Dutt believes Florida's climate, agricultural expertise and soils are perfect to develop an emerging agricultural enterprise.

"An added benefit is that finger limes have the potential to tolerate Huanglongbing (HLB or citrus greening disease), use less fertiliser and require less

pesticide than other forms of citrus," said Dutt.

In the project, scientists will plant several finger lime plots across the state at UF/IFAS and stakeholder facilities to measure how successful the plants are in different conditions, while researchers will also assess the best production methods to grow finger lime under Florida conditions.

UF/IFAS citrus breeders will help with the research, evaluating the fruit's tolerance to HLB, which will include sequencing the finger lime's DNA to identify disease-resistance genes.

This in turn may provide insights to enhance existing research underway to breed a citrus greening-resistant tree.

Researchers will also look at market opportunities for finger limes in Florida and potential for distribution both in institutional and consumer markets.

Tasting sessions will evaluate if consumers find the finger limes flavourful, appealing to taste and smell, and whether it looks good on a grocery shelf.

Dutt has been studying finger limes since 2012 and established a finger lime trial in 2017 with funding support from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – a pilot study that attracted the interests of several citrus and specialty crop growers who are enthusiastic about the project.

"We are excited about the possibility that a new citrus variety might be available to Florida growers," said Anna Jameson of Brite Leaf Citrus Nursery.

"We envision a steady growth of the market and there has been increased demand for this crop in the last few years," Dutt continued. "The UF/IFAS citrus breeding programme has some improved cultivars that are potentially superior to currently available varieties."

The current 18-month project is funded by the UF/IFAS Support for Emerging Enterprise Development Integration Teams (SEEDIT) program, designed to fund integrated research, extension and economics faculty team science to alleviate barriers in developing emerging enterprises for the state of Florida.

<http://www.fruitnet.com/americafruit/article/1474/parts-of-san-diego-quarantined-as-psyllid-count-mounts>

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Dutt has also received financial support from the UF/IFAS Plant Breeding Graduate Initiative to

fully support a doctoral student who will be researching the HLB tolerance characteristics of the finger limes.

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