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## The battle to protect the industry

By Martin Merzer And Phil Long

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CLEWISTON --

Jim Snively is vice president of groves for Southern Gardens Citrus, one of the state's largest growers, and he runs his own grove near the town of Venus, west of Lake Okeechobee in Highlands County.

He is 44, married, with three kids. His family has been growing citrus for four generations. He drives a 2001 Ford F-150 pickup with 232,598 miles on the odometer.

Here, in his words, is a ground-level assessment of the battle to protect Florida's citrus industry. It begins in 2004:

"We had hurricanes Jeanne and Frances that did a little bit of damage, but we said, 'Well, we'll get over that.' "

"Then, the canker came, and that was just a hit in the gut. So we got through that and we were like, 'Hey, no big deal. We're going to get over this, guys, we will plant back, we'll do everything we've got to do.' "

"Then [in the fall of 2005], we lost 50 percent of our crop to Wilma and, now, we are dealing with greening where we're pushing [destroying] tens of thousands of trees. It is just, you know, it's like, 'When do we get a break?' I mean, it was a very heart sinking feeling . . . .

"But we're over the depression. Now, the thing is, we're in the fight. It's all we know to do. I mean, right now we're doing what we know about this disease. We're doing the only thing that we know we can do at this time until science finds more answers . . . .

"This, without a doubt, is the biggest challenge we have ever been faced with. And when you throw it all together with the hurricanes, canker and now greening, it definitely is one of the biggest turning points we have ever faced in the Florida citrus industry.

"But I still believe that we will overcome this. Farmers just have a way of, you know, when they really get down and roll up their sleeves and really get into the battle, they'll find a way to do it."

"So I'm still positive about the future. I don't know that everybody is going to be able to gut out this situation. It's going to be tough, but we'll see where it goes."

"Is the industry going to be here 25 years from now? Yes, it'll still be here. Will it still be the same size? Probably not."