The Branch Experiment Station

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A Branch Experiment Station, to be devoted primarily and essentially to the study of citrus problems, has been established near Lake Alfred, in Polk county, Florida. This is a branch station of the University of Florida Agricultural Experiment Station at Gainesville and, like the latter, is under the exclusive control and direction of the Board of Control. The branch station has been established in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 7379, Approved June 4, 1917. This Act authorized and directed the Board of Control "to locate, establish and maintain a Branch Experiment Station, in or near Winter Haven, Polk county, in the citrus growing section of the State, where insect pests, diseases and other agencies, affecting the production of citrus fruits and citrus trees shall be studied;" provided, that no branch station should be established until lands, moneys, groves and other things of the value of not less than $10,000 should be donated for the use and purposes of the Branch Station.

By the summer of 1919, donations and subscriptions to this amount were secured by a committee of Polk county citrus growers, consisting of Messrs. S. F. Poole, J. A. Snively, J. H. Ross, H. W. Snell, L. L. Davis, A. M. Tilden, C. H. Thompson and W. L. Drew. The Board of Control shortly thereafter, on July 14, 1919, held its regular monthly meeting at Winter Haven and, in connection therewith, visited and inspected various proposed sites for the Branch Station, finally deciding upon an 84-acre property located on the Dixie Highway, about one mile northeast of Lake Alfred and forming, at that time, a part of the holdings of the Florida Fruitlands Company. This tract of land was donated for the purposes of the station by the Florida Fruitlands Company, the Board of Control merely refunding out of the cash donations made, the actual cost of planting and bringing the 14½ acres of grove on the property to its condition at time the property was transferred to the Board. This amounted to $5,900.00.

From December 1, 1919, to March 1, 1921, there has been expended on the property in fences, clearing, fertilizer, establishing seed beds, superintendent's salary, etc., the amount of $3,005.33, so that on March 1, 1921, there remained, out of the original donation of $10,000.00, a balance of $1,094.67. Since the latter date the Florence Villa Packing Association has paid over to the Board, for the Branch Station, $1,282.15 and the County Commissioners of Polk county, $2,500.00, so that the total cash resources (as of date March 1, 1921), out of
which running expenses are paid and for permanent improvements are $4,876.82.

On October 1, 1920, Mr. John H. Jefferies was appointed superintendent of the Branch Station and has given the property his constant and efficient attention since that time.

As a citrus property, the Branch Station is almost ideal. For the most part the land is sandy, typical of the Ridge Section and the topography gently rolling. As stated above, 14½ acres are in citrus grove. About 12 acres have been cleared and will be devoted in part to citrus and in part to ornamental grounds, seed beds, etc. About 17½ acres are in meadow and marsh and the remaining 40 acres are as yet uncleared. It is undoubtedly in the latter area that the principal experimental work with citrus will be conducted.

You will bear in mind that no appropriation has been made for the Branch Station, that no federal funds are available for use in connection with it and the total resources have consisted and still consist of the donations mentioned above. Under such circumstances work has had to proceed slowly. Nevertheless, considerable has been accomplished in the way of preparation for the serious business yet to come. Since acquisition of the property by the Board of Control about 12 acres of land have been cleared, plowed and placed in good tilth, about half the total area has been placed under substantial fence, seed beds laid out, and a small tool house constructed. Through the kindness of the City Council of Lake Alfred a road running the full length of the property, along its east side, has been surfaced with clay. Dr. R. W. Ruprecht, Physiological Chemist of the Experiment Station, is conducting on the Branch Station property a study of the cause of dieback and for this purpose is utilizing the young 10-acre grove consisting of four varieties.

It appears advisable, before proceeding with the clearing of the main tract, and with the platting and planting to citrus, to have a thorough soil survey, topography survey and biological survey made of the entire property. The information recorded by such surveys may go far, in future years, in explaining the outcome of experiments. We have not the funds now to make these surveys and they will have to wait upon legislative appropriations, but this work should precede all of the experimental work proper, as forming a proper basis for it. We do not want hap-hazard results from the Branch Station. We also have in mind giving careful consideration to the planting, so that plats strictly comparable as to drainage, soil and past floral history will be obtained. This calls for careful study, based on the preliminary surveys and, doubtless also, conferences with various citrus authorities. Do not be surprised therefore, if the plantings on the Branch Station do not show up with incredible rapidity, for it is going to be our policy to "make haste slowly" and, as far as possible, avoid undoing, in future years, things hastily done in the beginning. Kindly remember too, that we intend to have at Lake Alfred an Experiment Station and not a curiosity shop or a tropical fair.
The plans of the Board contemplate the early construction of a cottage for the superintendent, the cost of which can largely or entirely be defrayed out of the funds now in hand. In addition, as funds become available, it is planned to install a unit electric lighting plant and waterworks and sewage plants. As far as possible, these will be made models of what such outfits should be for typical and up-to-date Florida country homes.

The lines of experimental work to be taken up, when all is in readiness, will be greatly varied, including such research projects as variety tests, insect and plant disease problems, propagation methods, etc. One can see at a glance that there are unlimited opportunities for investigational work with citrus in Florida and all of the experiments and problems suggested by the growers cannot be taken up at once. On the contrary, attention must first be given to those problems most crying for solution or which presents prospects for prompt solution with results immediately applicable by the majority of growers. The establishment of the various citrus plats and the building and equipment of a laboratory, in addition to the superintendent’s cottage, will open the way for co-operation with various workers of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and there is no doubt but what many co-operative experiments will be conducted at the station. In fact, some preliminary arrangements in this direction have already been made.

So far as actual research work is concerned, the Branch Station is now virtually “marking time,” waiting for the legislature to provide for its needs. As a matter of information, you will be interested in knowing that the Board of Control in its budget shortly to be presented to the State Legislature, will ask for the following funds for the Branch Station:

Salary of superintendent, 2 years
at $2,000 -----------------$ 4,000

Current expenses, including labor, experiments, etc., 2 years at
$5,350 -----------------10,700

Permanent improvements, including laboratory building, water supply, fencing, etc., per annum at $8,300 -----------16,600

Total for 2 years ending June 30, 1923 ---------------$31,300

It is well to remember, too, that no federal support for the Branch Station will be forthcoming at any time: the Branch Station is exclusively a State institution and if the legislators do not provide for this promising infant it must necessarily meet an early and untimely end.