



early years of his tree farm Joel says, "This is the toughest job I have ever had." But, with a love for watching things grow and a determined approach to meeting challenges, he also admits that it has been the most satisfying. He explains that growing trees requires a lot of technique and the discipline to learn from mistakes. "If learning comes from making mistakes then I know a lot about growing trees, because I've made a lot of mistakes!" He also has found that about seventy percent of what every horticulturist does is the result of factual information. "We all read the same manuals and do things scientifically the same way," he says. "That remaining thirty percent is like art - it is unique to the grower." He believes that this is why one big company has not come in and dominated the nursery industry. "The small farmer with one acre, can compete with a hundred acre operation because it is all about finding a niche with your own unique artistic influence," he says.

Today, Butler Tree Farm has sixty acres in production and approximately 35,000 trees. Of the more than 15,000 that sell each year the beautifully shaped cathedral oak is in great demand, in addition to ten other varieties of trees including maple, holly, crepe myrtle and magnolia. There are now ten employees in addition to the faithful two who helped grow this business from the beginning. The first employee to join him, Marcos Hernandez, is now the farm manager and Jane, who Joel calls his "best cheerleader," is the financial officer. Also, with the help of a marketing group to oversee sales and promotions, Joel finally finds himself in a position to take some time away from the business. "I told Jane that weekends are now reserved for fun only!" he says.

Today, Joel sees his main role in the business as "quality control." He starts the day each morning by inspecting pruning techniques and checking for insects and other potential problems. He also makes a point to see that everyone's workload is equal. "I do not want anyone to continually get stuck with the same difficult job and experience burn out," he says. He gets feed back from customers when they come out to pick up trees, and takes time to provide tours of the farm for local youth groups and the horticultural students of Florida Southern College. Best of all, there are no power lunches at the downtown executive hot spot for this CEO. Come midday, Joel can be found enjoying a sack lunch and watching the wildlife go by, all from the porch of "corporate headquarters." •

## Citrus Mutual Makes Changes

A great inventor once said "The world hates change, yet change is the only thing that has brought progress."

In order to move forward as an industry we all must change behaviors and practices to keep up with the times. With this in mind, Mutual is launching a big push to increase the utilization of e-mail and other electronic communications including the Florida Citrus Mutual website - [www.flcitrusmutual.com](http://www.flcitrusmutual.com). We want to improve the way that we disseminate information and allow members a better opportunity to communicate their needs and concerns with us. The best way to do this is electronically via the Internet.

I know what many of you are thinking..."I don't use e-mail, I like to do my business in person" or "I don't trust someone who can't speak to me face to face." I certainly respect those points of view. But as the largest citrus grower trade organization in Florida, we are in the communications business. One of our primary responsibilities is to serve as a clearinghouse of information while communicating efficiently with our 8,000 grower members. As such, how can we ignore the Information Superhighway which provides us with the best way of distributing information in a quick and efficient manner?

These days issues move at light speed and we as an industry need to keep up.

Currently Mutual has e-mail addresses for only 10 percent of our members. That's it. I don't want to overstate the issue but this lack of an extensive electronic contact list is hindering Mutual's ability to do its job as well as it can be done.

Our hope is to increase e-mail correspondences so that the majority of our members will be able to receive timely updates on issues such as the Farm Bill, immigration reform, greening research and critical weather information. We can't do that by traditional U.S. Mail. Things change too fast.

We also want to boost participation in the Florida Citrus Industry Grassroots Network, which was created a few years ago to give growers a voice when a hot button issue popped up in Congress or the state Legislature.

We currently have several hundred e-mail contacts as part of the Network. But in an industry that has nearly 90,000 people we should have at least 10,000 - maybe 20,000. Imagine the impact 20,000 like-minded e-mails would have on a Congressman facing an issue critical to our industry?

An added bonus of going electronic is that not only will our communication improve drastically but we'll save money.

Mutual spends more than \$50,000 a year printing and distributing the Triangle newsletter. If we are able to convert a large number of members from print to electronic, that money can be used elsewhere.

In the coming months, as part of our electronic push, Mutual will also be updating our website, [www.flcitrusmutual.com](http://www.flcitrusmutual.com), to include vital news and information that will be updated on a regular basis. The updates to the website will also allow members to communicate with Mutual staff directly and immediately through comments on the 'Daily Squeeze' feature and other areas.

Moving to electronic communication is a big change for many of our members, but we are confident that through this change Florida Citrus Mutual will be able to serve members better.

So if we don't have your e-mail address please send it to [info@flcitrusmutual.com](mailto:info@flcitrusmutual.com). If you don't have an e-mail address, I highly suggest getting one. Think of it as an investment in our industry. If any growers need help selecting a computer or finding an Internet service provider, give us a call at (863) 682-1111. We would be happy to help.

Change is tough but in the long run change brings progress. Progress by definition will make our industry stronger and isn't that what we all want?