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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FLORIDA CITRUS HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES CHOSEN FOR 2017

LAKELAND, Fla. (December 9, 2016) – The Selection Committee for The Florida Citrus Hall of Fame has announced three distinguished leaders will be inducted into the Hall during the 55th Citrus Celebration Luncheon on **Friday, March 10, 2017** at Florida Southern College in Lakeland.

James H. “Jim” Ellis, of Bartow, Fla., T. Ralph Robinson (deceased), and Michael W. Sparks, of Apollo Beach, Fla., will be honored at the luncheon, scheduled to take place at 11:30 a.m. in the Hollis Wellness Center.

Jim Ellis has led a distinguished career for decades in the Florida citrus industry as a grower, packer, industry representative and historian. He is currently in charge of the Citrus License & Bonds in the Division of Fruits & Vegetables for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. A graduate of Florida Southern College, he was president of the Citrus Club and received the Florida Citrus Mutual Award for Outstanding Achievement in the field of citrus studies. As general manager of Lake Garfield Cooperative, he introduced the first electronic sorter to the state of Florida, experimented with cutting and scoring grapefruit, applying a sweetener and shrink wrapping them to market as a breakfast item, along with different forms of automated fruit harvesting equipment. He served on numerous boards, including stints as president for the Polk County Farm Bureau, Florida Citrus Showcase and the Interior Seald-Sweet Shippers, Inc. His passion for the citrus industry and its history has led him to collect numerous artifacts, and he has one of the largest collections of Florida citrus crate labels in the world, which is the nucleus for the Florida Citrus Label Digital Collection at Florida Southern College. His collection has been used in three books on citrus labels, and in the newly developed Polk County Citrus Label Driving Tour, which is part of the county’s History & Heritage program. Dr. Calvin Arnold noted “Jim really gives to the industry from his heart, with no expectation of personal gain – his passion IS the citrus industry.”

T. Ralph Robinson (1876-1967) was a native of Syracuse, NY, but moved to Terra Ceia, Fla. in 1910. A graduate of Syracuse University, he went to work for the USDA in 1901 working in plant physiology investigations. He spent over 30 years working on the development of new citrus varieties, managing test plantings in 25 different sections of the state. He was primarily responsible for the commercial production of Orlando and Minneola tangelos, and the Robinson tangerine was named for him because of his expert work in citrus breeding. He was part of a team of scientists that included Hall of Fame member Walter Swingle who were among the earliest to experiment with cross-pollination in citrus to develop new varieties. He was a past president of the Florida State Horticultural Society and his biography is listed in “American Men of Science” and in “Who’s Who,” along with approximately 80 titles of papers he wrote on horticultural subjects.

Mike Sparks has dedicated his entire professional career to the Florida citrus industry, starting with the Florida Department of Citrus (FDOC) where he worked for 29 years in various capacities: as CFO, Director of Administration, Deputy Executive Director and Interim Executive Director. As such, he worked under six different Executive Directors and 87 Citrus Commissioners during very tumultuous times, which resulted in restructuring within the FDOC. For the last ten years, he has been the Executive Vice President and CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual (FCM) in Lakeland, Fla., which is the largest citrus grower trade association in the world. Under his leadership, FCM has been able to secure unprecedented funding both on behalf of the Florida citrus industry and for national USDA programs such as CHRP, MAC and APHIS, as well as citrus and marketing programs. His efforts also led to significant long-term appropriations for pest and disease research, including \$125 million in mandatory Farm Bill funding directed primarily at citrus greening research, and trade victories on tariff protection, including anti-dumping actions, which resulted in almost \$16 million to FCM members. Dan Gunter, former Executive Director of the FDOC, noted: “Mike is energetic, intelligent and he has integrity. He’s always served the industry and his work has had a positive impact on a number of challenging issues.”

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The induction luncheon ceremonies will take place on Friday, March 10, 2017 in the Hollis Wellness Center at Florida Southern College, Lakeland. Invitations will go out in January, and ticket information will be available on the web site, www.FloridaCitrusHallofFame.com, later this month. For more information, contact Brenda Eubanks Burnette at (561) 351-4314 or BBurne1003@aol.com.

The Florida Citrus Hall of Fame honors distinguished leaders who have made significant contributions to the Florida citrus industry. The Citrus Hall of Fame display and Archive Center is located within the McKay Archive Building at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. For more information on members of the Citrus Hall of Fame, visit the web site at www.FloridaCitrusHallofFame.com which includes access to biographies and photos on all members, noting their accomplishments and including various industry links.

Tickets to the luncheon, which is co-sponsored by Florida Citrus Mutual and The Florida Department of Citrus, are \$100 for Patron Seating or \$1,500 for a Sponsor Table, which includes preferred seating for 8, table signage and a listing in the program. The event will be followed by the Florida Citrus Processors' Association's OJ "Meet & Greet" with the inductees as they unveil their names on the Florida Citrus Hall of Fame Tree, located in the McKay Archives Center. An educational citrus exhibit will be featured during the month of March and tours of the Citrus Archives will be provided by the Florida Citrus Hall of Fame Fellowship students on the day of the event. Shuttles will provide transportation between the Hollis Wellness Center and the McKay Archives Center, where the main parking lot is located. A portion of the proceeds from all ticket sales will go to fund an Educational Outreach program to promote the history of the Florida citrus industry.

To purchase tickets, please call Florida Citrus Mutual at (863) 682-1111 or visit the Florida Citrus Hall of Fame website at www.FloridaCitrusHallofFame.com. For more information on sponsorship opportunities, please contact Brenda Eubanks Burnette at (561) 351-4314 or via email at BBurne1003@aol.com.

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