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**CRB Researcher Michelle Cilia Honored with
Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers**

President Obama bestows award for cutting-edge innovation

January 18, 2017 – Visalia, California – Michelle Cilia, Ph.D., California Citrus Research Board (CRB) researcher and research molecular biologist for the United States Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) at the Robert W. Holley Center for Agriculture & Health on the Cornell University campus in Ithaca, New York, has been named a recipient of the Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE). The recognition is the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their independent research careers.

“We are very proud of Michelle and her achievements,” said Richard Bennett, CRB Board Chairman. “The PECASE award is a high honor that speaks to the quality of research being funded by the CRB. California citrus growers are truly getting the “best of the best” scientific researchers, who are working on cutting edge technologies to ensure a sustainable future for the California citrus industry.”

Cilia’s CRB-funded research focuses on huanglongbing (HLB or citrus greening disease), which currently is the most critical threat to the U.S. citrus industry. HLB is associated with a bacterium spread by the Asian citrus psyllid (ACP). There is no cure for this disease and affected citrus trees produce bitter, green fruit and eventually die from infection related causes. Research in the Cilia lab focuses on the protein level interactions responsible for the acquisition and transmission of the bacterium by ACP.

Cilia said, "One of the most exciting and fulfilling parts of my scientific career has been working with the California citrus growers and the California Citrus Research Board. The forward thinking and innovation of the CRB in funding cutting-edge research has enabled my program to understand how the citrus greening bacterium is spread by insects in the grove. This information is critical for scientists to develop new tools to thwart the disease. I'm deeply honored that my research has been recognized by President Obama. I hope that my PECASE award will draw the public's attention to this serious disease, which is threatening citrus production in this country and around the world."

"The Citrus Research Board is proud of Dr. Cilia earning this award," said CRB President, Gary Schulz. "Each year the CRB funds in excess of \$7 million towards citrus research; we are pleased Dr. Cilia has been chosen for this award because of some of her work for us."

"It is great that a scientist whose talents we have recognized and whose work we have supported is now renowned at such a high level," said long-time CRB board member and citrus grower, Jim Gorden. "This is confirmation of the level of talent the CRB has been able to attract to work on solutions to problems facing the citrus industry. Those of us who know Michelle are thrilled for her. Congratulations Michelle!"

"As a CRB-funded scientist, we have had the chance to get to know Michelle's work quite well, and she is quite deserving of this award," said CRB board member Jeff Steen. "Just as important as her top-notch research and scientific skills, however, are her abilities to build amazing collaborative teams and to translate her work into language laymen like myself can understand. Her cooperative, honest, and direct workstyle are models I use when evaluating other scientists. We are proud of our relationship with such an outstanding scientist, and wish to offer her our heartfelt congratulations."

The Presidential Early Career Awards highlight the emphasis that the White House Administration places on encouraging and accelerating American innovation to grow our economy and tackle our greatest challenges. The awards, established by President Clinton in 1996, select researchers for their pursuit of innovative research at the frontiers of science and technology and their commitment to community service as demonstrated through scientific leadership, public education or community outreach. Cilia is one of three being honored in the agriculture sector.

“I congratulate these outstanding scientists and engineers on their impactful work,” President Obama said. “These innovators are working to help keep the United States on the cutting edge, showing that Federal investments in science lead to advancements that expand our knowledge of the world around us and contribute to our economy.”

The CRB administers the California Citrus Research Program, the grower-funded and grower-directed program established in 1968 under the California Marketing Act as the mechanism enabling the state’s citrus producers to sponsor and support needed research. More information about the Citrus Research Board can be found at www.citrusresearch.org.

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