

# Meet Dr. Monique Rivera— New Subtropical Fruits Entomologist at UC Riverside

**D**r. Monique Rivera began her career at the University of California, Riverside (UCR) in July 2018 as an entomology extension specialist. Prior to joining UCR, she worked in many different cropping systems along the East Coast. As a post-doc, she worked in the laboratory of Dr. Lukasz Stelinski, University of Florida, Citrus Research and Education Center, where her research focused on vector-borne diseases such as huanglongbing (HLB/citrus greening) in citrus and laurel wilt in avocado. In California, she intends to work on the entomological issues growers find most important with a focus on vector-borne diseases, perseia mites and others, as well as pollination enhancement. She looks forward to working with California avocado growers and is interested in hearing what problems most concern them. She can be reached at monique.rivera@ucr.edu, 1.951.827.9274 (office) or 1.323.628.5234 (mobile).

We asked Dr. Rivera a series of questions as a means of introducing her to California avocado growers. Her responses are below.

## **1. How did you become interested in entomology?**

I didn't know what entomology was until I started college and was looking for majors. It seemed different and interesting. I took my first class and then secured an internship the following summer with the integrated pest management (IPM) specialist in my home state of Delaware. I learned that I liked entomology, but I also loved agriculture. From there I knew I wanted the focus of my career to be in agriculture.

## **2. Where did you get your PhD and what was your research focus?**

I finished my PhD in 2016 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The focus of my PhD was plant domestication in highbush blueberry and how that impacts below-ground biological control of root-feeding insects with entomopathogenic nematodes. I was able to compare domesticated plants to wild plants in the Pine Barrens that have been preserved since the domestication of highbush blueberry in New Jersey.

## **3. Can you tell us a little bit about the research you did in Florida for your post-doc and how that has prepared you for your current position?**

My experience in Florida was perfect preparation for this position. I worked with two vector-borne diseases, HLB in citrus and laurel wilt in avocado. These two diseases are major threats to the California citrus and avocado industries, respectively. I not only gained hands-on experience working with these two systems, I also made relevant and dependable connections that will be highly valuable going forward.



*Dr. Monique Rivera*

## **4. Were you involved in any laurel wilt research and what are your thoughts on how the California industry can prepare for this disease?**

I was directly involved in laurel wilt research. We were able to generate compelling data on push-pull management systems in the field to help repel and kill incoming beetles. In terms of preparing for the disease, right now the focus should be on monitoring all surrounding states, not just within California. It is important to know the distance from the nearest infection. Furthermore, educating growers about the disease will be key to preparing them for this potential threat.

## **5. What attracted you to the job opportunity at UC Riverside?**

Honestly, in the academic job market, you go for what is available and what is a fit for your work. Without question the position was a fit for my experiences and interests. I just happened to get lucky — the entomology department at UCR is prestigious and filled with great people to work alongside. I never expected that I would end up in California! 🍋