

## **Moving Forward with Preventative Strategies**

Prevention is an essential part of IPM. Most of the time we associate prevention with early release of biocontrol agents, before there is a pest problem. However, there is more to preventative pest control than that.

What if the pest arrives before you can even release biocontrol agents? Thrips are coming in on propagative cuttings and from a few individuals, populations can increase to damaging levels within a few weeks despite early releases of biocontrol agents. Building on the success of earlier research on poinsettia cutting dips against Bemisia, we continued to see if we could reduce thrips infestations in a similar manner.

Another key intervention point for preventative pest control is plant resistance. Is there any way we can make plants less susceptible to thrips and slow down their population growth so that the biocontrol agents can catch up? Studies suggest that high fertilizer levels stimulate pest reproduction. This year, we are starting a new project to identify nutrient regimes that reduce thrips population growth without negatively affecting plant quality. We will also evaluate if biostimulants can compensate for lower nutrient inputs.