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INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM ON IMPORTED
FIRE ANTS, SOUTHEASTERN BRANCH,
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While there have been many exotic insect pests inadvertently introduced into the United States, only a few have had the dramatic impact that the imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta* Buren and *S. richteri* Forel) have had on the southern states. Certainly this is understandable to anyone who has seen their small child receiving dozens of fiery injections of venom or to a farmer who suddenly realizes that his lush verdant pasture has become the mound construction site for hundreds of colonies of fire ants, each with 100,000 to 200,000 workers who are willing to attack anyone who disturbs their happy home. Unfortunately, as happens only too often, efforts to attack such problems run astray and are fraught with nonscientific or political decisions that only frustrate the problem. When this happens the participants, as well as outsiders, often choose up sides and a consensus for developing a strategy to control the invader is never achieved. In the past this scenario has been typical of efforts to control imported fire ants. Most importantly it has caused confusion which has frustrated efforts to obtain adequate funding of the research that is needed to develop satisfactory techniques. Fortunately, this trend has been reversed in recent years. Currently, the Agricultural Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is supporting the research of 8 scientists; state funds have been provided by the Texas legislature for research at Texas A&M University and Texas Tech University and by the Florida legislature for research at the University of Florida. All of this research effort is beginning to have a positive effect. A recent compilation of publications on imported fire ants revealed that about 200 scientific papers have been published on various aspects of their biology and control over the last 5 to 6 years. Therefore, it seems timely that the status of imported fire ant research be reviewed. Periodically, it is good to look back to see where we have been and forward to see where we should go. The research reviews presented today will be published in the *Florida Entomologist* and thus made available to anyone else interested in the wonderful and fascinating world of imported fire ants.