

Potomac Division 79th Annual Meeting

March 22-24, 2023, Hilton Garden Inn Fairfax, Virginia

“Plant Health for a Sustainable Future”

Meeting Minutes- Nina Shishkoff, Secretary

The American Phytopathological Society (APS) Potomac Division’s 78th Annual Meeting was conducted on March 22-24, 2023, in Fairfax, VA. This was the first in-person meeting since the Covid-19 pandemic. The meeting had a total of 58 registrants. It featured three special symposia with ten invited speakers and there were seven member-contributed talks, ten poster presentations, and eight graduate student oral papers, seven of which were delivered by students belonging to the Potomac Division. The meeting theme was “Plant Health for a sustainable Future”. The meeting was sponsored by Corteva agriscience and Syngenta as platinum donors, Nicole Donofrio and Jake Jones of the University of Delaware, FMC, and Bayer at the silver level, and BASF at the bronze level.

The meeting opened on the afternoon of March 22nd with a field trip to nearby Zephaniah Winery in Leesburg, VA. This was followed by the Industry/Extension session introduced by Jill Pollok, University of Delaware. This session included two talks from industry and six from extension, with a special bonus talk by Mannon Gallegly (WVU). Afterwards, there was an opening social and poster session allowing the poster authors to stand next to their posters and field questions.

On Thursday, March 24th, breakfast included a “Networking 101” session for interested students. The meeting proper began with a welcome and introductions by Potomac Division President Sudeep Mathew (Syngenta). Then Nicole Donofrio (U Delaware), APS Councilor-at-large, presented the National APS “President’s Update to the Membership” in the place of APS President Ron Wolcott, who was unable to attend. The first symposium of the day, moderated by Dr. JoAnne Crouch, Research Leader of the USDA/ARS Foreign Disease/Weed Science Research Unit (FDWSRU) in Frederick MD, featured scientists new to the Potomac Division, in order that they could introduce their research to the membership. The first speaker was Dr. Alina Puig of the FDWSRU, speaking on “Phytophthora pathogens of Theobroma cacao”. She was followed by Dr. Lina Rodriguez Salamanca of Virginia Tech University (VTU), speaking on “Plant Diagnostics in Virginia”. The final talk was by Dr. Emily Pfeufer of FDWSRU, “Evaluation and characterization of Phytophthora spp. To determine their risk to U.S. citrus production”. After a break, the second symposium, “Breakthroughs in Applied Research” was moderated and sponsored by Jake Jones of FMC and began with a talk by Tyler Harp of Syngenta: “Preservation of yield potential with fungicides in row crops”. This was followed by a talk by Nidhi Rawat of the University of Maryland on “Genome-wide discovery of susceptibility factors for Fusarium head blight in wheat” and a talk by Menjun Hu of the University of Maryland on “Effects of spray tactics on selection for fenhexamid resistance in Botrytis cinerea”. Finally, Michael Fulcher of the FDWSRU spoke on “Identifying targets for weed biological control through microbial community and genome sequencing”. The two symposia were followed by a discussion of the Plant Disease Note



Fig 1. Potomac Division tour of Zephaniah Winery, March 23, 2023.

Writing Competition (“Lessons Learned”) by Rachel Melnick (USDA NIFA), Nina Shishkoff and Emily Pfeufer (FDWSRU). The winner of the competition was announced, Madeline Henrickson of the University of Delaware.

Potomac Division President Sudeep Mathew opened the business meeting, and Matt Kasson (WVU) provided the Divisional Forum Update. He reported on feedback from the 2022 Plant Health meeting in Pittsburgh, PA, suggesting that members had been overwhelmed by talks and wanted more time to network. There was also a request that APS Regional Divisions help provide supplemental funding for student members of the newly formed APS Africa Division, and a discussion of this was slotted later in the meeting agenda under “new business”. Vice President Rachel Melnick (USDA NIFA) put up a motion to approve the minutes of the 2022 Potomac Division meeting; this was seconded by Christopher Clarke (USDA ARS Beltsville) and approved by the membership attending. Treasurer Nina Shishkoff (FDWSRU) presented the previous year’s Treasury report. There was strong sponsorship, with \$5000 in contributions, and few meeting expenses due to the virtual nature of the 2022 meeting. However, losses to the TIAA-CREF investment fund led to a slight loss overall of \$1400 for the year, with the Division still financially healthy at a balance of \$38,076. New business for the meeting opened with the announcement of the election results, with Jill Pollok of the University of Delaware unanimously voted to become the new Secretary/Treasurer. After that, the committee for local arrangements for the next

Potomac Division meeting was announced: Matt Kasson and Mahfuz Rahman of West Virginia University (WVU) agreed to represent West Virginia in 2024. There was then a discussion of the Memorial Fund for Individual Contributions. In 1981 a special fund was set up by the Potomac Division to allow the membership to donate to student awards. When National APS centralized control of Division funds, all general donations went to the National organization, and donations to the Division went into one account for meeting sponsorship, taking away the ability of members to donate money toward specific Division priorities. A suggestion was put forward to request of National APS that the Memorial Fund be reinstated. After that, there was a general discussion of our graduate student opportunity programs: which we most valued, what other programs we could provide, and how to get greater participation from students. There was a suggestion from JoAnne Crouch to including post-docs and early-career personnel in such programs, and others suggested offering workshops on how to communicate scientific information to the general public. Finally, there was a motion to provide \$300 to subsidize student membership in the APS African Division; this was seconded by Nicole Donofrio and carried by the membership. There was a motion to adjourn, seconded by Anton Baudoin.

After the Business Meeting, the Graduate Student Paper Session was held, sponsored and moderated by Nicole Donofrio and featuring 7 students from the Potomac Division competing in the Graduate Student Competition, with one non-division member presenting. The students were: Madeline Henrickson (University of Delaware), Inty Hernandez (WVU), Eboni Traverso (University of Delaware), Kristen Pierce (WVU), Kabita Shah (Pennsylvania State University) Danielle Mikolajewski (WVU), Qi Li (VTU), and Carlos Saint-Preux (VTU).

That evening, the Banquet and Awards included a number of new features as well as old traditions. Because of Covid-19, the Presidential Gavel had not been able to be ceremonially passed from the retiring President to the new one since Matt Kasson, so Christopher Clarke and Alyssa Koeler were given plaques with gavels on them to commemorate their Presidencies. The 2023 APS Potomac Division Distinguished Service Award went to Matt Kasson for his research excellence, clear communication of science to the general public online and in the media, as well as his service to the Division. A special Award of Merit was presented to Mizuho Nita for his record-breaking, Covid-19-defying service as local meeting coordinator since 2019. The winner of the Graduate Student travel Award was Kristin Pierce (WVU). The winners of the Graduate Student Research Competition were Eboni Traverso and Madeline Henrickson, both of the University of Delaware, tying for second place, and Danielle Mikolajewski (WVU), in first place.

Meeting Resolutions were read by Nina Shishkoff. Afterwards, two cakes were brought out to celebrate the “ninety-nine point ninth” birthday of Mannon Gallegly (his hundredth birthday was April 11th) and many Potomac Division members shared memories of their long acquaintanceship with Mannon, who has been a member of the APS Potomac Division since 1949 and was President of the Division in 1965. The Banquet Speaker was Steve Davies, Associate Editor for Agri-Pulse, whose talk, “Reflections of a reporter”, provided his perspective on the difficulties of presenting scientific data through journalism to the general public. He then took questions from the audience.



Fig. 2. President Sudeep Mathew A) presenting Dr. Matt Kasson (WVU) with the APS Potomac Division Distinguished Service Award; B) presenting a special Award of Merit to Mizuho Nita (VTU) for his record-breaking service as local meeting coordinator; C) declaring Kristen Pierce (WVU) the winner of the Graduate Student travel Award; D) declaring Eboni Traverso (U Delaware) tied for 2nd place winner in the Graduate Student Research Competition and E) Madeline Hendrickson (U Delaware), winner of the Student Writing Contest and tied for 2nd place in the Graduate Research Competition; F) declaring Danielle Mikolajewski (WVU), 1st place winner in the Graduate Student Research competition.



Fig. 3. Celebrating Mannon Gallegly's 100th birthday at the Potomac Division Banquet.



Figure 4. Banquet speaker Steve Davies, Associate Editor for Agri-Pulse.

On March 24, The Friday sessions began with a symposium on “Breakthroughs in Molecular Plant Pathology”, moderated by Christopher Clarke. The first talk was “Steroidal glycoalkaloids contribute to anthracnose resistance in *Solanum lycopersicum*” presented by Matt Fabian (USDA ARS, Beltsville). This was followed by “Towards RT-PCR diagnostic assays for detection and quantification of *Colletotrichum* species on apple” by Srdjan Acimovic (VTU) and “Towards High Throughput Sequencing as a Diagnostic and Surveillance Tool For Plant Pathogenic Bacteria” by Eric Newberry (USDA APHIS PPQ). After the special session there was a contributed paper session moderated by Srdjan Acimovic. The talks were “Potential for Biocontrol of Fire Blight and Defense-Related Gene Induction by *Methylobacteria* Treatment in Apples” by John Bennett (USDA ARS), “Expanding Fungicide Modes of Action for Controlling Apple Bitter Rot in Virginia” by Srdjan Acimovic, “Characterization of apple viruses and transcriptional differences between declining and asymptomatic trees in orchards with rapid apple decline” by Tamara Collum, (USDA ARS), “Identification of *Colletotrichum* Species Causing Apple Bitter Rot in Virginia” by Srdjan Acimovic, “Mutation of an amino acid ABC transporter reduces chemotaxis in the soft rot bacterium *Pectobacterium carotovorum* subsp. *carotovorum* WPP14” by Yuan Zeng, (VTU), “Application of Molecular Diagnostic Assays for Early and Accurate Detection of Potato Common Scab Pathogens” by Brett Shelley (US ARS Beltsville), and “Shoot Blight and Fire Blight Canker Prevention on Pear by Giant Knotweed Extract” by Srdjan Acimovic.

The meeting adjourned with Departing Comments by retiring President Sudeep Mathew and the welcome and passing of the gavel to Rachel Melnick.