





Plants from our production systems provide us food, feed, fiber and medicines and account for a considerable portion of the Gross Domestic Product and payments in foreign trade. Hence, growing plants in a sustainable and economically viable manner is required for the United States to be secure. Maintaining plant health from naturally occurring or purposefully introduced disease agents is the role of research, instruction and outreach programs in plant pathology, but there are many voids in the security and sustainability of our plant production systems.

The American Phytopathological Society (APS) is a non-profit, professional scientific organization representing more than 5,000 scientists and practitioners of plant pathology dedicated to the study and control of plant disease. The **APS Public Policy Board** (PPB) provides scientific input on public policy issues, from funding and regulatory issues to increasing the awareness of plant pathology among policy makers and agency personnel. www.apsnet.org

April 2005

The APS seeks your support for the following:

 **The National Research Initiative** (NRI), housed within the USDA, has the mission of funding essential, fundamental research targeting current agricultural problems, and anticipating future research needs. The NRI has sponsored research projects that have dramatically benefited agricultural science and technology, and the agency is highly respected within the research community because of the very competitive process used to identify projects for funding. Although originally authorized at \$500 million in 1990, the actual allocation for NRI has never approached this level, and the President's request for FY 06 is \$250 million. ***The NRI is and has been chronically and significantly under funded.*** A result of this under-funding is that many important projects are turned away each year, with substantial opportunity missed to improve our nation's international competitiveness. ***We therefore urge that funding for the NRI be increased to \$250 million to ensure that the NRI advances its stature as the premiere program for competitive agricultural research funding, and so that critical fundamental research in plant and microbial genomics, plant-microbe interactions, and crop biosecurity can be conducted.***

 **The National Plant Diagnostics Network** (NPDN) was established in 2002 to enhance national agricultural security. The charge to NPDN was to establish a means of efficient, timely, secure exchange of plant disease information and provide a coordinated infrastructure for effective diagnostics and rapid response to threats to plant health. In this relatively short time, significant progress has been made toward establishing a nationwide network of public and state institutions and organizations with a cohesive system to facilitate detection, identification, notification and response to pests and pathogens introduced into our agricultural and natural ecosystems by intentional or unintentional means. Many gaps remain, however, and it is clear that the \$8.9 million allocated this year is inadequate for the 50 states to properly fund and operate their diagnostic centers. ***Therefore, we urge that funding for the NPDN be increased and annualized to expedite progress in this nationwide effort as part of the \$30 million outlined in the President's budget for the Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative.***

CAUSE **Component Analysis for Understanding the Sustainable Environment (CAUSE).** Sustainable agriculture is a widely embraced but inadequately understood umbrella under which the economic, biological and social aspects of the agricultural enterprise can be viewed at a systems level. However, it is clear that we must have a much greater understanding of the components of sustainable agriculture (e.g., rhizosphere ecology, environmental monitoring) to adapt practices to a variety of geographic locations and agricultural systems. The Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education program provides some funding for systems application of established knowledge, and the National Research Initiative supports research to elucidate the components of plant-microbe interactions of model systems at the molecular level. However, these programs have very broad and much different research agendas. Thus there is immediate need to begin focus on the components underlying the nature of associations among plants, microbes, and the environment in modern production systems to assure that producers continue to be provided guidance on achieving sustainability. ***Therefore, we urge that \$5 million be allocated to allow focused research on the important components of plant health to improve the sustainability of U.S. production systems.***