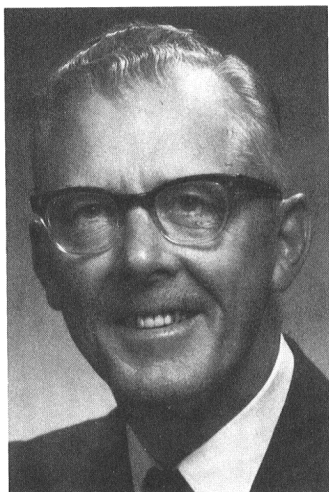


# Credibility—Our Currency in Public Relations

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In 1969, as a member of the APS Public Relations Committee, I delivered a message to our members at the 61st annual meeting in Spokane on the subject: "How to Improve Our Public Image." Later I was asked by the editor of *BioScience* to submit the paper for publication in that journal; the article, with the title "As Others See Us," appeared in the November 15, 1970, issue (pages 1197–1200). The credibility of plant pathologists is still important to achieving recognition and respect from our associates,

both within and outside our profession. Our credibility appeared to be at a low point in the 1960s. Members of our Society became frustrated because editors refused to accept papers of an applied nature. Some members threatened to drop their membership to Phytopathology. J. G. Horsfall, at the same APS meeting, showed his concern for our credibility as plant pathologists; he found only 18% of the papers published in Phytopathology related to field research, compared with 65% 20 years previously. Judging from the number of articles now appearing in *PLANT DISEASE* and *Phytopathology*, the balance between laboratory and field research papers has improved.

Unlike *Plant Disease Reporter*, *PLANT DISEASE* is eye-catching and not restricted in distribution. *PLANT DISEASE* attracts readers other than plant pathologists engaged in extension, consulting, teaching, and applied research. I see the extension field staff, agronomists, chemical field and sales people, commercial applicators of fungicides, elevator operators, and even growers subscribing to our new journal. Articles on plant diseases previously published in the *Agronomy Journal* will now have a home where the article will be edited by individuals familiar with plant diseases. This alone will help plant pathologists achieve credibility for their profession. Our editors are maintaining the high standards set by the USDA in *Plant Disease Reporter*. We were exceptionally fortunate to have had many years of service from the USDA at no cost to the members of our Society. There is no doubt in my mind that our credibility and hence our public image will be improved as a result of *PLANT DISEASE*.

Have we changed since 1969? Yes we have, but only because of the help and influence of many dedicated plant pathologists. For example, the efforts of the Plant Disease Losses Committee and the Plant Disease Management Coordinating Committee of APS and a special national committee headed by John Fulkerson of the USDA encouraged research to develop the technology of disease loss modeling and methodology. A guidebook to use in the field, "A Manual of Assessment Keys for Plant Diseases," prepared by Clive James, is now available from APS. A special E. C. Stakman Commemorative Symposium on Crop Loss Assessment was held at the University of Minnesota 20–23 August 1980 to review the progress of this important technology. As our standards for determining crop disease losses improve, so will our credibility as plant pathologists.

I believe we have improved our credibility as plant

pathologists in a number of ways during the past 12 years: 1) We are working more closely with plant breeders, agronomists, and horticulturists on plant disease control—in fact, we often have the leadership in these interdisciplinary programs. 2) We are giving more publicity to plant disease control through news releases and radio and television programs. 3) Many plant pathologists are working more closely with the public and people who have problems relating to plant health. 4) Extension plant pathology programs have been expanded at most state land grant universities by the addition of personnel. Also, the initiation of a successful National Plant Disease Detection and Information Program in several states has added to our credibility. As a result, plant pathologists are seen more often in the field talking to the extension field staff and to growers about plant health problems. 5) Training programs on crop protection have been introduced in institutions of higher learning. 6) Credibility has been gained at some institutions by the establishment of a separate department of plant pathology. Yes, we have come a long way during the past 12 years, and our administrators acknowledge this by assigning more and more responsibility to plant pathologists.

But what if you do not have exposure as plant pathologists? During the 1960s, well over 200 plant pathologists were assigned to research and administrative positions in various divisions of the ARS-USDA. ARS-USDA entomologists, on the other hand, were assigned to the Entomology Division. I recall asking the director of the Entomology Division if the entomologists would be recognized today had they been dispersed in the crops research group like the plant pathologists were. His response: "The entomologists would not even be recognized." In other words, the entomologists would lack the recognition that has come with having their own division.

I also recall viewing a research display at Beltsville, MD, set up by the USDA for the International Horticultural Congress. I remarked to the branch chief that the display was the best one of plant pathology research I had seen. His answer: "This is not an exhibit of plant pathology research, this is a display of horticulture research." The horticulturists received the credit.

We do have a public relations problem in gaining adequate support. This has been especially significant for individuals engaged in production research. To increase our credibility we must publicize our accomplishments and our service to mankind. *PLANT DISEASE* will help us.

Finally, a message to plant pathologists who believe their contributions to society go unrecognized. Do not despair. Recognition comes in many ways—as a distinguished teacher, as an elected Fellow of APS, as a lecturer to faculty and graduate students at another university, as a recipient of a distinguished service award from grower or industry groups. Sometimes a roving reporter will write an article for the *Reader's Digest*, *IBM's Think*, or a similar magazine describing your contribution to mankind. Many of us who have been involved in disease resistance breeding programs have been rewarded for our contributions. The best example is the Nobel Peace Prize granted Norman Borlaug. For years, our Society has been publishing the names and contributions of our award-winning co-workers in *Phytopathology News*.

As plant pathologists we must continue our efforts to obtain the recognition due us. Our duty is to take the leadership in programs relating to plant disease control, whether educational, extension, research, or regulatory. By so doing we will improve our image and add to our credibility as plant pathologists.