

Letter to the Editor

Phytopathological Terminology: Epiphytotic vs. Epidemic

C. C. Ryan and R. G. Birch

Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, P.O.Box 292, North Brisbane, Queensland, Australia.

The arrangement of contents in *Phytopathology* under Section Headings since Volume 66 (1) has proved useful for scanning of issues and subsequent retrieval of reprinted papers. The Section Headings used appear to delineate adequately the various fields of plant pathology. However, we believe that the choice of the term "epidemiology" in a Section Heading was unfortunate. The word epidemic is derived from the Greek roots *epi* upon, *démos* people, and is correctly defined as a large-scale temporary increase in prevalence of an infectious disease among people (4, 5, 6). The correct term for a widespread temporary increase in the incidence of an infectious disease of plants is epiphytotic (Greek *epi* upon, *phuton* plants). Likewise, plant diseases permanently established in an area are enphytotic (4, 5) and the study of epiphytotics is epiphytotiology (3). Epiphytology, a term sometimes misapplied to the study of epiphytotics (2, 4) is the study of epiphytes (3).

Although "A Guide to the Use of Terms in Plant Pathology" (3) recognizes the usefulness of the term epiphytotic to avoid ambiguity, it paradoxically recommends the use of epidemic "in a broad sense". We believe that this policy is likely to lead to terminological inconsistency and confusion. Evidence of this inconsistency can be found in recent publications. *Phytopathology* Volume 66 (4), for example, includes papers reporting on "epidemiology" and on "epiphytotics" under the Section Heading "Ecology and Epidemiology". In several recent papers, the terms epiphytotic and epidemic have been used interchangeably in the text (1, 2).

We suggest that *Phytopathology*, as an international journal of high standard, dealing specifically with the science of *plant* pathology, should adopt an editorial policy which encourages the use of a precise and unambiguous terminology. In addition to ensuring consistent and correct usage of these terms in this journal, such a policy would be beneficial in key word abstracting and in literature searching, and would enable separation of papers dealing with plant diseases from those concerning diseases of man and animals.

We therefore recommend that the terms epiphytotic, enphytotic, epiphytotiology and similarly derived words be used to replace epidemic, endemic, epidemiology and related words in the Section Headings and papers appearing in *Phytopathology*.

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