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A Look at Ourselves and to Our Future

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What I would like to visit with you briefly about today concerns several items that face us as professionals and us as a professional society. Several years ago when Anne Vidaver was president, she commissioned a survey of the women members of APS to determine what their interests, and particularly their concerns, were about the profession and APS. During her presidential address two years ago, she described the results of that survey. I think we all learned a great deal from that survey that hopefully will help us all to meet the needs and concerns of a portion of our society that is increasing every year. Council decided the next year that we also needed to do such a survey for all members of APS since many of the issues raised in Ann's survey were broader than just women's issues, but involved all of the membership. Furthermore, Council had never conducted a survey of the total membership to see if APS really is meeting your needs. So, Al Weinholt asked an ad hoc committee, with Jackie Fletcher of Oklahoma State as leader, to put together the survey instrument and then to assist in analyzing the results.

Your interest in voicing your concerns was indicated by the fact that more than half of you, numbering some 2,080 individuals, did take the time to fill out the survey. Speaking on behalf of Council, we were very gratified at such a response, which is unusual for most surveys. You have seen some of the results presented in *Phytopathology News*. But in case you haven't, I'd like to briefly highlight a few items. Sixty percent of you who responded are in the 30-50 year old category, 18% were women, 25% were international members, and 90% have been a member of APS for more than 3 years; 77% said that your needs were being adequately met by APS. While there are many other interesting tidbits that have been published in *Phytopathology News*, I'd like to focus on the written comments that came back as the result of six questions posed to you, because I think these responses represent the ideas, concerns, and issues that are facing us as individual professionals and as a professional Society.

This past spring at our mid-year Council meeting, the Council worked its way through the responses and identified five recurring themes that seemed to surface. One has to do with the costs of doing business, that is membership dues, journal costs, page charges, annual meeting registration fees, etc. This is something that Council wrestles with continually, since we are torn between providing the services that you as members have come to expect from a professional society, and the diminishing resources that many of you have available to you individually and via your employer. All I can say is that we have tried to maintain a balance such that the journals and books are ones that you can be proud of, as I'm sure you are, and the services meet your needs such as the placement service, help with committees, annual meeting arrangements, etc. We all know that you basically get what you pay for, and I think APS, in conjunction with the Cereal Chemists, is getting a very good product. Your survey responses would indicate that most of you also agree.

Another concern raised has to do with public relations and the public's awareness of what we do and the importance of plant disease. As with the other four concerns and issues identified by Council, I assigned the Councilor's-at-Large to identify an action plan such that Council can begin to address these issues. Certainly, with much of each of our financial support coming from public sources, it behooves us as a Society to make sure

that what we do is understood by all. Thus, we hope to be able to develop a strategy by which Council can address this problem, although I also think that it is a problem that each of us in our own situation must work to improve.

A third concern involves our interactions with foreign members. Many of the survey respondents from overseas voiced a great concern about issues that particularly impact them, such as journal costs, time of receiving the journals, and access to the Society. As you may know, Council established the Office of International Programs, headed by Charlie Delp, several years ago. Recently Council voted to merge the International Activities Committee with OIP such that the combined organization may be better able to help APS address the issues of our international members.

The fourth issue relates to the very lifeblood of the society and that involves students and student recruitment. We all know that there are fewer high school students and fewer are choosing to go into science and agricultural careers, and this is now beginning to be felt by us in plant pathology. The number of potential graduate students is dropping. While some may cheer this because it may make the competition for jobs ease up, we must be somewhat concerned before the tide turns so much that we have fewer numbers coming in than there are available jobs. I personally feel that each one of us may have to take recruitment on as an individual challenge, such as volunteering to visit local junior and senior high schools to talk about what we do, or even better yet, to help the teachers carry out classroom projects that involve plant diseases. I know you are going to hear more about this next year as Paul Williams brings this issue to the forefront of our meeting in Grand Rapids. I also think we are going to have to do more in hiring high school students, and also undergraduates, for part-time work during the school year or especially during the summer. Many of us can look back to the summer jobs we had, or the professor we knew who hired us during the school year, as the reason we learned about plant pathology and eventually came to call it our profession. If it weren't for Artie Browning and Dean Foley at Iowa State, I know I wouldn't be here today. I'd like to challenge each of you to assess your role in searching out the youth in your communities who could be challenged to a career in science, and particularly in plant pathology.

The final issue that Council recognized as a central one for many of you concerns the involvement of graduate students and young members of our faculties and staffs in the affairs of APS. Phrased another way "How does one get access to APS," its committees, programs, etc. Is it really an Old Boys Network or can we provide equal access to all? Several suggested adding a graduate student to Council or better utilizing students and young faculty and staff on committees. At the annual meeting in Richmond, Council voted to establish an ad hoc committee on graduate students to address the issues raised in the survey. This committee's suggestions will be seriously considered by Council and implemented if feasible.

One issue that I sensed in reading through the 700 plus written responses was one that Council did not select as needing special attention, but I'd like to bring it up anyway. That involves what appears to be a developing gap between traditional plant pathology and molecular biology or molecular plant pathology. Many expressed concern that the two seem to be heading in opposite directions. This was mentioned enough times that I think it certainly is an issue for many and I would like to challenge you to come up with ways to bridge this developing gap so that we

reach a balance. I personally don't see it as a gap—molecular biology is merely a new tool that we can use to delve into questions that previously appeared to be intractable. I liken it to electron microscopy that was just developing when I was a graduate student. Not all of the answers to plant pathology were found in EM, but it did provide, and still does, a technique to solve various problems. I think that if we can continue to keep sight of the reason for our being—to understand and control plant disease, or perhaps to turn it around, to understand and maintain plant health—then we should be able to embrace this new technology and use it where appropriate to solve the many problems in plant health that still remain before us.

The last topic that I would like to address concerns the future of APS and its ability to serve you the members. This particularly involves the physical plant that we call "Headquarters." When fire destroyed the building in downtown St. Paul where APS was housed in the late 1960s, this situation provided the society with a challenge and an opportunity. That challenge of where and how to house the few staff members that were carrying out the activities of publishing *Phytopathology* was met by many of you by assisting in the financing of a new headquarters building, to be shared fifty-fifty with the American Association of Cereal Chemists. J. C. Walker was the chairman of the fund raising committee and his hard work and the vision and courage of Council, plus your generosity, allowed us to purchase the present site and put up the current building. Since there were only eight staff members at that time, much of the building was rented out to nearby businesses. However, over the years as the activities of both societies expanded to meet the ever increasing needs and desires of the membership, we eventually used all of the building until today, 55–60 people work in a space designed to house 40–45. The fact that the original investment was a wise one can be seen just by looking at the financial aspects. We purchased the 5 acres of land for \$45,000 and its current appraised value is \$435,000. Furthermore, the building was constructed for \$300,000 and is now worth over \$1 million. This area of south St. Paul is now prime real estate with neighbors such as Unisys, banks, medical facilities, etc. So from a very practical business viewpoint, the building has been an excellent investment.

The only problem is that we have outgrown the available space. We are a major publishing firm as well as being the headquarters for the two professional societies. The staff necessary to publish seven journals, two newsletters, and 8–12 books a year, plus membership directories has grown to the point that efficient operation is threatened. In addition to our publishing business, headquarters staff are involved in member recruitment, collection of dues, committee and divisional requests for assistance, and annual meeting arrangements. Thus, the Councils of the two societies began several years ago to assess what could be done to relieve this situation.

One possibility was to discontinue some of the services provided and relegate these back to volunteer assistance the way it was in the "good old days." I still remember at UC-Davis in the early 1960s seeing E. E. Wilson working nearly full time as Editor-in-Chief of *Phytopathology* with no senior editors to help. Also at that time Watt Dimock at Cornell was the business manager of the society. It is amazing to me that universities would allow faculty to basically devote full time to running the affairs of a professional society. That just doesn't happen today. And I doubt that many of you would, or could, volunteer to spend nearly full time to take care of society business. Thus we depend on paid staff to do what used to be handled by volunteers—but that's just a fact of life that I doubt will change.

If we are to continue to provide the goods and services that we expect from a professional society, how are we to do it? The Headquarter's Operation Committee composed of equal represen-

tation from APS and AACC considered several building options to relieve the overcrowding. One was to separate the staff into two buildings, but this was rejected since there is too much interaction between departments and there would be loss of productivity and creativity with this arrangement. Another option was to farm out the typesetting and graphics activities, but we soon came to realize that this would not save any money and actually would increase the costs of publication considerably.

A third option was to reap our profits from the current building, i.e., sell it, and move to a cheaper location. While on the surface this seems like a good idea, the problem was that we couldn't afford the mortgage payments on an entirely new building. Furthermore, we would have to move the current staff and it was unlikely that many of them would choose to move their families to a new location. Disruption of ongoing activities also would be difficult to accept, particularly delay in journal publication schedules, etc. Leasing of nearby space in another building was also considered and rejected since it too would cost more money. We are a tax-exempt organization so leasing does not provide a tax write-off that is available to taxable organizations.

The fifth option, the one we finally accepted, was to build on to the current building. Therefore an architect was commissioned to come up with suitable plans to accommodate our needs. This was done this past year, and the Councils of the two societies voted this past spring to go ahead with construction, which is now under way at a cost not to exceed \$900,000.

This step has taken some courage on the part of the various society officers since there is always a cost associated with progress and that is the financial cost of constructing such an addition. Since half of the building is the obligation of APS, Council voted to use \$150,000 of our reserves as a down payment on the \$450,000 that is our portion of the total cost. What about the other \$300,000? Initially, we will borrow the money from the bank, which will necessitate annual mortgage payments of about \$37,000. If the principle could be reduced considerably, or even completely, this would reduce greatly the overall costs to the Society.

One of the enlightened things that Council has done in recent years is to establish the APS Foundation. This organization was set up to look to the future and develop ways and means of financing activities that will further the profession of plant pathology. Jim Tammen is the first and current chairman of the Foundation. When the Foundation Board Members learned that Council had decided to go ahead with the building addition, it was determined that the need for building funds meshed very nicely with the Foundation's desire to carry out a major endowment fund raising campaign. So the decision was made to mount a joint campaign to be headed by Ed Kendrick and Dick Ford, which would allow members to contribute to the future of our profession. Over the past two months you have read about this campaign in *Phytopathology News*. This summer you received in the mail a letter and brochure from the Foundation inviting you to participate in this campaign. Hopefully, many of you have already responded. But if not, I'd like to take this opportunity to urge each of you to consider supporting the Foundation's campaign, and in so doing, strengthen APS's ability to serve its members now, and long into the future. We certainly must thank those members in the past who saw that the future of this society lay in providing the necessary resources for conducting the society's business in the form of both a physical plant, and the financial base to allow us to take on new ventures such as Plant Disease, MPMI, Office of International Programs, etc. Your support of this campaign will go a long way toward insuring the future strength and vitality of APS. We are a strong and vigorous society, thanks in large part to you, the active and creative members. We have some real challenges ahead to keep us strong but I'm sure that we can, and will, meet these challenges.