

Looking to the Future

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PLANT DISEASE, though only 3 years old, is the most widely circulated journal of plant pathology in the world. Its present character and appeal are basically products of the vision and energy of Malcolm C. Shurtleff, its first editor-in-chief. Mal has a knack for sensing the needs of people, and he has devoted a generous portion of his creativity to the American Phytopathological Society.

Mal would not be happy, however, if credit stopped without acknowledging the generous contributions of others, including the senior

and associate editors, led by Donald E. Mathre; Albert O. Paulus, who served so ably as editor for features; and the APS staff in St. Paul, who so masterfully edit and publish the journal.

PLANT DISEASE originated from a need to continue and expand the services performed by *Plant Disease Reporter* after the United States Department of Agriculture decided to cease publication of that journal. A USDA subsidy eased the transition, and without this support, PLANT DISEASE could not have emerged in its present form. APS appointed a committee, with R. James Cook as chairman, to establish the "purpose and scope" of the new journal. The committee's statement is clear: "PLANT DISEASE is an international journal for the exchange and dissemination of new information on the management and control of plant diseases. The journal is for reports of original research; for rapid reporting of new diseases or disease epidemics; for reviews of needs, approaches, and accomplishments; and for exchanges of opinions, all with emphasis on the practical aspects of maintaining and improving plant health."

PLANT DISEASE has a mandate to be an international journal of applied plant pathology that assists and appeals to those who work in or have an interest in areas of practical plant disease control. Almost all plant pathologists are interested in applied plant pathology even if their primary activity is in the basic developmental aspects of that science. The same holds true for many outside our immediate discipline who interface in one way or another with the various aspects of plant disease identification and control.

We must use PLANT DISEASE to communicate clearly with others, both inside and outside our discipline. This involves careful handling of content, format, writing style, and terminology. Content is basically the product of public and private research, teaching, and extension experience submitted for purposes of dissemination and record keeping. Content should be technically accurate, arranged in an appealing manner, written in a style easily read, and couched in terms understandable to the intended clientele.

Plant pathology, like its sister sciences, has developed a wide range of specialized scientific pursuits typified by a number of organized interest groups. This is most evident at an APS annual meeting, where the program is layered with concurrent committee meetings or subject matter sessions. Each group

tends to develop jargon that may be unintelligible to another group. This can lead to a "Tower of Babel syndrome" and alienation unless a common communication denominator is utilized.

PLANT DISEASE is in a position to serve as a common meeting place where special interest groups can offer their wares for use and possible adoption. If this role is assumed, and I believe it should be, we must use every means available to communicate clearly with as many interest groups as possible, both inside and outside the Society. This includes a writing style that avoids undue use of specialized terminology. Authors should be cognizant that PLANT DISEASE has a wide audience.

The quality of contributed papers is examined carefully through the review process. Contributions of an applied nature that add to the knowledge of the science and are prepared in the proper manner are accepted for publication. A paper judged to make its contribution to more basic aspects of the science may be referred to *Phytopathology*, if the author concurs.

Letters to the editor within the scope of PLANT DISEASE are strongly encouraged as another means of increasing communication among plant pathologists as well as with others in associated sciences. Letters have the potential to raise significant issues that may be highly beneficial to readers. The tendency to think of letters to the editor as being complaining or negative is universal, but a letter can be positive and constructive by outlining new concepts or ways of improving a procedure or process. I hope we receive a variety of letters that will be provocative. Letters probably represent the most accessible forum for communicating needs.

One point made in the original "purpose and scope" was that PLANT DISEASE would permit the rapid reporting of new diseases and disease epidemics. "Rapid" is usually perceived in days or perhaps weeks, but bringing such reports to publication takes at least 4 months, sometimes longer. We regret such delay, but reality dictates policy.

The major mission of PLANT DISEASE is to improve plant health science, especially by publishing new research findings and interpreting those findings to the community of practitioners. All plant pathologists can contribute to this effort through publication of research papers, features, and letters.

PLANT DISEASE, like any journal, is always in the process of becoming what it ultimately will be. The need for decision making is continuous, and the Editorial Advisory Board is involved in deciding whether to add new sections, drop old ones, or take new directions. Also being considered are how to expedite publication of new disease reports and whether to publish plant disease loss estimates. Such decisions are not made lightly.

Because PLANT DISEASE is an international communications medium, it functions as a leading indicator of the health and progress of phytopathology as a discipline. A vibrant, progressive, innovative PLANT DISEASE can mean a vibrant, progressive, innovative discipline and APS.

I want to appeal to all plant pathologists to support PLANT DISEASE in every way possible—by submitting manuscripts for publication, by serving as senior or associate editors, by reviewing papers submitted for publication, by offering opinions through solicited editorials or unsolicited letters, by encouraging subscriptions among others who may find the journal useful, and by contributing financially through dues and advertising support.