

Plant Disease Notes: Some Adjustments and Fine Tuning

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In 1983, PLANT DISEASE initiated a new section called Disease Notes. The primary objectives were: 1) to provide a repository for observations of the sort important to diagnosticians, field advisors, and compilers of plant disease indices and 2) to encourage condensed reporting of disease observations while preserving integrity and prestige of the reports. W. A. Sinclair was the driving force behind the idea and launched the section, and R. D. Berger assumed the job of editor as part of his duties as senior assigning editor. Soon the volume of submissions was such that

the Editorial Advisory Board recommended appointing a separate editor for the section, and in February 1984, I became editor of Disease Notes.

From its inception, Disease Notes has been a vibrant and popular section, with submissions coming from many countries. Any new idea, however, requires adjustments and fine tuning during the first few years. Such is the case with Disease Notes. At the last two APS annual meetings, the Editorial Advisory Board discussed the content and philosophy of Disease Notes. At the 1985 meeting in Reno, the board adopted some changes and modifications.

One of the most difficult tasks of an editor is to evaluate the significance of a report. Certainly, significant outbreaks of diseases warrant publication (an example that comes to mind is the recurrence of citrus canker in Florida). Likewise, significant movements of pathogens occur that substantially change the known geographic location of a disease or document encroachment or establishment of a disease within an area. Such reports are certainly noteworthy and warrant publication. However, one also sees reports of "yet another occurrence" of a well-established disease within a well-documented area. State-by-state reporting of a disease that is well established within a broad regional area seems inappropriate for an international scientific journal. A report generally conceived to be of "local interest only" or being submitted only because it has never been "officially" published before should be examined carefully. In many instances, a report indicating that a particular disease is *not* in a given state might be more significant than one indicating it is. Reporting all occurrences of diseases on a state-by-state basis is tantamount to compiling a host index, and although host indices are extremely valuable, the Editorial Advisory Board does not see PLANT DISEASE serving that role.

It is not possible in an editorial to enumerate all the appropriate and inappropriate or the significant or nonsignificant reports, as significance is often in the eye of the author. Therefore, one of the new requirements for Disease Notes will be a statement of significance accompanying each submission. In his editorial introducing Disease Notes (PLANT DISEASE, Vol. 67, No. 10, page 1056), Sinclair suggested that authors submit such statements, although admittedly a report's

significance should be obvious from the title and content. In practice, very few authors have submitted such statements. The statement of significance will be sent to the reviewers along with the Disease Note and hopefully will help both the reviewers and the editor to evaluate the report. The statement need not be long (perhaps a paragraph) and should be typed on a separate page along with the title and the author's name.

Another modification concerns the inadequate demonstration of a causal relationship between a suspected organism and its host plant and incomplete identification of the organism. Many submissions have been received in which an "association only" is reported, e.g., "a *Genus* sp. was isolated from declining plants and is most probably responsible for the decline." Certainly Koch's postulates need not be repeated for a report of a change in disease location, a major epiphytic, or other noteworthy account of a known pathogen, but when a new disease or new host is being described, the necessity for proof of pathogenicity seems axiomatic. There will, of course, be exceptions to this, as, for example, with some of the more fastidious obligate parasites. As a rule, however, the Editorial Advisory Board does not believe PLANT DISEASE should publish reports in which no causal relationship has been established.

The limited space available in the Disease Note format precludes detailing methods and data analysis, thereby limiting the ability of reviewers to evaluate the report critically. Most reports of new diseases should be submitted to the New Diseases and Epidemics section of the journal, thus assuring that methodology and results have withstood peer review. Because of this, the Editorial Advisory Board decided to combine the editorship of Disease Notes with that of New Diseases and Epidemics. One person would then be able to keep track of submissions relating to new diseases, new hosts, new races, new locations, etc., and be in a better position to recommend the appropriate format. Presumably, some the reports describing new diseases and now being submitted to Disease Notes are better suited for the New Diseases and Epidemics section.

Many authors and reviewers have commented about the limited space allotted for a Disease Note. The current format is 16 double-spaced lines, including the title and the author and affiliation. The Editorial Advisory Board agreed to increase the number of lines by 25%, allowing 20 lines but keeping the width at 17.5 cm. Longer reports mean fewer published per page, but this should not result in a page charge increase.

Another change involves the references. As before, only two references are allowed, but now they should be numbered and cited in the text. Space is still a factor, so the much abbreviated style will be continued. Because publications other than journals may not be readily accessible to many readers and also cannot be cited accurately with the abbreviated style, only journal articles may be cited.

The last change adopted by the Editorial Advisory Board is the inclusion of the titles and authors of Disease Notes in the table of contents. The primary reason is to allow Disease Notes to be picked up by abstracting services. This should help increase the informative function of the reports as well as the number of citations.

Many of these changes have been suggested by authors. We hope the modifications will add to the utility and credibility of Disease Notes. These actions represent a continued effort on the part of PLANT DISEASE to respond to the needs and desires of the readership.