

E Pluribus Unum . . . Are We Ready?

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When Columbus came to the Western Hemisphere nearly 500 years ago, he found land that, unknown to him, extended unbroken from one arctic region to the other. Not only did the geography and climate vary, but the joined continents eventually became a mosaic of countries, cultures, languages, and governments, with as many opportunities as differences among their peoples.

Plant pathology in the Americas has evolved parallel with cultural and political development. Diseases are as varied as the native and introduced crops, but

because the continents extend through both temperate regions, there are similarities north and south. Some disease problems in Canada are similar to those in southern Argentina or Chile. In some of the larger nations in the Americas, plant pathology has evolved parallel with that in Europe. Argentina, Canada, and the United States are but a few of the countries where plant pathology has been at the leading edge of the profession, albeit their progress has differed.

With the variety of opportunities and problems in the phytopathological milieu, and with today's several communication networks, one might expect the flow of information among plant pathologists throughout the hemisphere to be swift and strong. With limited exceptions, however, this is not the case. National boundaries and language barriers inhibit this flow. Many phytopathological groups in the Americas do not interact significantly now, either for lack of knowledge of the interests of others or because of historical difficulties in moving information from one place to another.

The Caribbean Division of the American Phytopathological Society (CD-APS) has helped over the years to bridge some of the phytopathological differences and promote communication. Unfortunately, many South American nations fall outside the geographic domain of the CD-APS. The International Society of Plant Pathology (ISPP) offers a forum for exchange among countries, but because of its global scope and because half of the meetings are held on the other side of the world, access for most people from the Western Hemisphere is limited.

There are presently many associations of plant pathology in the Americas. The youngest one, to my knowledge, was born just last year in Costa Rica. Would it not be exciting if a network was developed that could bring together all American plant pathologists, with their differences in expertise, techniques, and anxieties? Would it not be exciting to be able to compare notes with those in faraway places, or to recruit brilliant students who otherwise might not have a chance to fully develop their scientific potential?

The dream of a hemispheric plant pathology network may be approaching reality. At the last meeting of the CD-APS in San Andres Island, Colombia, the idea of a hemispheric network was presented by members of the Latin American Phytopathological Society and the Colombian Association of Phytopathology. We brought the idea back to Council at the 1988 annual meeting in San Diego. The Council unanimously supported the concept of a unification of efforts of plant

pathologists in the Americas. "One Out of Many," proudly proclaims the motto on the Great Seal of the United States, and it could well echo the purpose of such an organization—to bring together the many groups now acting separately and make one family to benefit all. When the CD-APS meets in Cali, Colombia, in July, President D. E. Mathre, Vice-President G. N. Agrios, and I will be there to further discuss the idea.

As with the United Nations, the Organization of American States, or any organization bringing countries together, the advantages are many. The proposed organization would offer a forum for exchange of ideas and promote a flow of information among new cooperators. Think what can be done now with the modem, the fax, and overnight shipping! Within minutes, a manuscript can be transmitted to a colleague 2,500 km away. Given the proper permits, an isolate or antigen can be transported to a faraway cooperator overnight.

Regular meetings, properly spaced, would facilitate updating of isolated faculty and researchers and present opportunities for development of cooperative research. Common interests could be identified, whether in pathogens, diseases, control practices, or new technologies—or in all of these. The new alliance would allow not-so-well-known plant pathologists from distant countries to share their knowledge and expertise. This alliance might be just the uniting link for which we have been searching.

To be best utilized without becoming a burden, hemispheric meetings could be held every 5 years and scheduled midway between ISPP meetings. Thus, an opportunity to attend a major international congress would be available every 2.5 years. Annual meetings of each society or division would continue.

There are pitfalls. "Who will pay for it?," asks the administrator. "Just another meeting," says the international traveler. "Such an organization may usurp some functions of my national organization," cautions someone else. But let us address these concerns. A phytopathological organization with international justification and programs may be funded more readily by such agencies as USAID and FAO and by foundations and governments than would organizations representing single nations or regions. ISPP membership, which includes subscription to their newsletter, is \$8 per year—certainly affordable for most people. Attending the convention would be the most expensive item, but airlines and hotels offer good travel packages to large groups.

Such a conference may be just another meeting for some, but for those who work near the city where the meeting is held, it may be the chance of a lifetime to interact with well-known colleagues from remote places. Bureaucracy and territorial behavior could indeed stifle new linkages, but with care and tact, this problem can be avoided.

What should be the name of this network? Federation of American Societies of Plant Pathology may be appropriate. Federation implies central coordination of a group of separate organizations, each of which controls its own internal affairs. Consortium, organization, or association might also be considered.

Almost 502 years to the day from when Columbus first visited the Americas, the annual meeting of the APS will be held in Acapulco, Mexico, in conjunction with the CD-APS and the Mexican Phytopathological Society. Would not it be timely to celebrate this anniversary by also inviting other societies and associations from the Americas and make this meeting the occasion on which the family of American plant pathologists from the Caribbean and North, Central, and South American areas get closer together and begin a new era of understanding and cooperation? I think it would be great. What do you think? Are we ready?