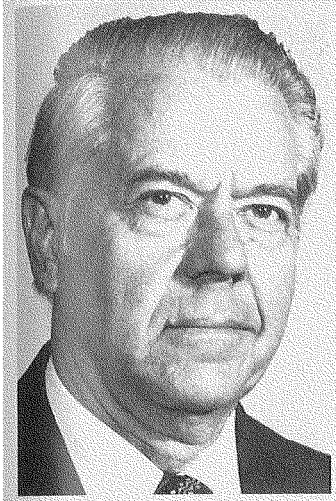


The County Extension Agent— Our Front-Line Force

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Successful extension plant pathologists learn early in their careers about the value of a well-trained staff of good county agents. Without such personnel, plant disease controls cannot be taught to farmers, orchardists, nurserymen, and other growers. It matters not how good or well known the college plant pathologist may be; the local agent with his hard-earned reputation and status is needed to get new technology adopted. He is the first to learn of unusual plant disease occurrences and, after making preliminary

judgments on diseases, probably then contacts his state extension pathologist.

The county agents also know the value of a good pathologist who can diagnose crop diseases and prescribe both short- and long-term controls. Growers want good, practical answers as rapidly as possible, answers that often can be provided only by a plant pathologist. Many times the agent will say, "I can't diagnose your problem. It looks like a disease to me, but let me send it to our plant pathologist, Dr. Blank, at the college, and he will get back with a good diagnosis soon." If fine relationships have been established by past experiences, the agent and his grower constituents will have confidence that the plant pathologists will do all they can to help diagnose and control the disease.

Most successful commercial growers know their state extension plant pathologists by name and understand their role in the agricultural production process. Since about 60% of a county agent's contact time involves insect, weed, and plant disease problems, he soon learns that his time is well spent in educating himself in pest control, especially for the crops of most importance in his county or region.

In recent years, phytopathologists have become concerned about their visibility, image, and appreciation by laymen, the press, and legislators. Cooperative extension agents who have

been properly trained and serviced by dedicated plant pathologists are helping constantly to identify us and the work we do. Agents easily sort out the differences among an agronomist, a horticulturist, and a plant pathologist! Time spent in teaching and updating county agents will pay off both immediately and, especially, in future years. The agents often speak for us and understand the whole technology of the specific crops in their counties better than we ever will. They know how to integrate new disease control techniques at the level of understanding of their constituents. Today, many states utilize regional rather than county agents, and we are dealing with better trained and better paid personnel who can aid pathologists in applied plot work, diagnose the more common diseases, and carefully evaluate the need for on-the-scene visits from college pathologists. Some regional people are eager to develop expertise in plant pathology or pest control, which will especially aid those of us in the larger states where our numbers are all too few. Good agents reduce out-of-office time for college professors.

So, cultivate carefully the ear and goodwill of agent personnel who are on the front line of our extension system. These experienced agents demand more expertise from us than in earlier years, so we must lead, not follow, them. In-depth agent training should be a prime work objective.

In *PLANT DISEASE*, we have an excellent teaching medium for agents. Its format, contents, and advertisements should be of considerable interest to agents, who, in certain instances, may be authors or coauthors of its papers. We must call its availability to their attention in every possible way—formally and informally.

PLANT DISEASE speaks to extension workers, applied researchers, agribusiness personnel, and the better-educated growers. Through *PLANT DISEASE*, understanding of the role we phytopathologists play in today's society will improve. Those of us in the extension and other applied phases must contribute early and regularly to the journal to obtain and hold the broad readership that must be built. Maybe we won't be talking largely to ourselves and our graduate students anymore, as we have tended to do in *Phytopathology*.

The journal is under way, and those who felt its need and helped bring it to reality now have an obligation to make certain our agent and commercial contacts know of this new publication, *PLANT DISEASE*.