

ISPP's Hope for the Future

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According to its statutes, the general objectives of the International Society for Plant Pathology (ISPP) are "to promote the development of plant pathology by initiating and sustaining international cooperation towards this end." Without doubt, the claim to be international is meant to be as comprehensive as possible. In 1970, 2 years after being founded, ISPP consisted of 13 national phytopathological societies. Today, 40 societies with more than 12,000 members are included. Most of these societies were established during the

past 10 years, to a great extent at the suggestion of ISPP's Executive Committee.

Why is an international organization necessary? One answer is that the international organization stimulates foundation of national societies, thus paving the way for advancing plant pathology on a national level. We are still far from achieving our goal of uniting all plant pathologists of the world within ISPP, however. Political, organizational, financial, and other problems are responsible, and we must continue our efforts to remove these obstacles.

To achieve its objectives, the ISPP is charged to "sponsor a series of International Congresses of Plant Pathology . . . and other international meetings on plant pathology and related subjects." Three international congresses have been held—in London in 1968, in Minneapolis in 1973, and in Munich in 1978—and a fourth is planned for 1983 in Melbourne. The justification for such large congresses is questioned again and again. In my opinion, these major congresses fulfill important functions, provided the intervals between meetings are not too short. The congresses allow a comprehensive view of developments in the whole field of plant pathology, thus counteracting the danger of isolating certain disciplines. A large number of colleagues from all parts of the world can make contact within a few days and can also meet in small, changing groups. In organizing such congresses, keynote papers or symposia on topics of general interest should be emphasized, and enough time and space should be allowed for personal contacts and initiatives. Poster sessions are especially suited for presenting new research data.

ISPP can also contribute to small, specialized meetings with an international character. One example is the international conferences organized regularly by the Committee on Plant Pathogenic Bacteria.

The 14 existing committees of ISPP, as well as the three being established, are composed of experts from a wide geographical area. The origin and aims of the committees vary widely. Some deal with specific groups of pathogens, such as bacteria, soilborne pathogens, and *Phytophthora* spp., and some are concerned with specific problems, such as mycotoxicology, taxonomy of phytopathogenic bacteria, and crop loss assessment. Others, such as the Committee on Chemical Control and the Committee on Stable Resistance, are involved with important strategies of control. A special responsibility lies with the Committee on Teaching—almost everyone agrees that improved teaching methods and means can contribute significantly to the progress of plant pathology, particularly in developing countries. The same holds true for the committees on extension and for exchange of books and journals.

"To promote the development of plant pathology" means first of all to advance knowledge in the science. But in a world in which peace and welfare depend on supplying food to a rapidly growing population, this cannot be an end in itself. Programs based on scientific knowledge must be aimed at effectively controlling destructive plant diseases and thereby eliminating constraints in food production. Diseases that are destructive in many countries, rather than those of only regional importance, should be stressed. For example, planning conferences organized with the participation of ISPP have dealt with such problems as bacterial wilt caused by *Pseudomonas solanacearum* and the graminaceous downy mildews. These conferences attempted to identify gaps in our knowledge about the diseases, to prepare plans for cooperative research, and to find effective ways of preventing crop losses.

Unfortunately, ISPP is rich in expertise but poor in funds. The main financial support comes from the associated societies, which contribute 1% of their annual income to ISPP. Such funds cannot suffice to finance research programs. The necessary funds must be obtained elsewhere, and cooperation with other international organizations, such as FAO, is important in this regard.

Nobody doubts the importance of plant diseases, least of all plant pathologists. Nevertheless, plant diseases are only one of the factors reducing crop yields. Insects, weeds, and rodents contribute to losses, and there are many interactions among pathogens and pests. That plant diseases cannot be looked on in an isolated way is becoming more and more evident in the era of pest management and integrated plant protection. In the United States, this understanding has led to the formation of the Intersociety Consortium for Plant Protection. Perhaps this organization can serve as a model for closer cooperation among scientific societies involved in plant protection on an international level.

ISPP's hope for the future lies in promoting the science of plant pathology and contributing to solving practical problems on a worldwide scale.