Editorial

Plant Disease—An Evaluation

M. C. SHURTLEFF
Editor-in-Chief, *Plant Disease*

The life of any new publication is perilous. Commercial publishers try out many new titles, and if success is not immediate, the titles disappear. Current economics dictate swift departure of books not able to pay their own way. PLANT DISEASE is starting its second year of publication. It is still a fledgling and as such will continue to undergo change until the right mix of editorial content meets the needs of its readers. When this occurs, the editors and the Society should expect the journal to be paying its own way. Nonprofit publishers are no different from their commercial colleagues—both must pay the printer and the U.S. Postal Service.

Late in 1980 PLANT DISEASE asked its readers to respond to a questionnaire designed to solicit detailed information on reader likes and dislikes and to establish a demographic profile for the editors. An unusually high response resulted from this survey—2,300 of the 5,210 questionnaires mailed were returned. And to provide even more information, 996 persons took the time to write comments. We thank you for your time and cooperation.

A complete analysis of the data is in progress. However, the editors wanted to share the basic information with you as soon as possible, before all the correlations are made and final conclusions reached.

If PLANT DISEASE has an average reader, that person has a graduate degree (usually a doctorate), works primarily in the area of research and teaching, and has about 15 years' experience in the plant health disciplines. He or she receives a number of trade magazines in addition to subscribing to an average of five scientific journals. We're told that our readers share PLANT DISEASE with colleagues, that each issue is read by 2.5 persons. This suggests a readership of approximately 13,500—a very good base for a new publication.

About one-half of the responders said they read most of PLANT DISEASE. Again an excellent response, since the journal has many research-oriented articles directed to the worker in a narrow specialty. Finally, an evaluation of the editorial content highlighted areas of low and high interest. The editors are in a position now to adjust content to more closely match readers' needs.

Few new publications in the marketplace can claim instant success. The editors recognize that much work remains before PLANT DISEASE meets the goals set by the governing body of The American Phytopathological Society and by the journal's Editorial Advisory Board. On May 6 and 7 the Board met at headquarters to review the progress of PLANT DISEASE and to chart its future course.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture ($236,000), awarded to APS in 1979 to develop the successor to *Plant Disease Reporter*, has been exhausted. We are now on our own! In the coming fiscal year, PLANT DISEASE faces a projected deficit of about $70,000. The deficit has come about because the Editorial Board was overly optimistic about the number of subscribers the journal could attract and the revenue that could be gained from advertising.

The Editorial Board is thus recommending to the APS Council changes in the format and policies of PLANT DISEASE that are necessary to balance the PLANT DISEASE budget for fiscal 1982. The recommendations are: 1) to shift the expense item of *Phytopathology News* from PLANT DISEASE to APS Member Services; 2) to charge institutional subscribers $90 instead of the current $60 (*Phytopathology* charges $100); 3) to use a less expensive binding and eliminate color from the cover and feature articles, except where the authors or their institutions are willing to carry the cost; 4) to request authors of feature articles to honor page charges; 5) to increase page charges from $55 to $65 per page (in *Phytopathology* as well as in PLANT DISEASE); and 6) to charge an added fee for each printed page over four in articles in both journals.

PLANT DISEASE is performing a real service. But the only alternatives the Editorial Board can see are to economize or to discontinue publication of PLANT DISEASE. We have tried to economize where it would "hurt" the least. We hope the APS Council, APS members, and PLANT DISEASE subscribers will agree.

Here are the problems we still face: 1) PLANT DISEASE is not attracting enough *applied* articles. 2) PLANT DISEASE also needs considerably more interdisciplinary articles. 3) The number of research papers being published must increase, or the time lag between submission and publication will increase. 4) Although the Editorial Board recognizes that individual subscribers want to hold the price of the journal as low as possible, this has become exceedingly difficult; postage and general inflation have increased the cost of production far in excess of our projections more than three years ago. 5) PLANT DISEASE needs more time to grow into its original goals. The present cutbacks should give us that extra time without endangering the entire project. Several improvements have been recommended and will be implemented to make PLANT DISEASE a truly *applied* journal.

The Editorial Board is enthusiastic about PLANT DISEASE, about the progress that has been made, and about the future of the journal. We hope you share this enthusiasm. We need your help and support.