# Letters

## Powdery Mildew Was Studied on Winter Wheat, Not Barley

I was pleased to have an excerpt about work done in Oklahoma on the effects of powdery mildew printed on the Focus page in the July 1981 issue of PLANT DISEASE (page 556). However, I find it hard to understand why it was reported that this work was done on barley. The title of the abstract of the paper presented at the APS North Central Division meeting in June is: "Effects of Powdery Mildew on Grain Yields of Winter Wheat." Barley was not discussed.

This is a serious error because not more than 100,000 acres of barley are grown in Oklahoma, and powdery mildew is not a serious problem. However, 7.9 million acres are planted to winter wheat in Oklahoma, and the prevalence and severity of powdery mildew have been steadily increasing in recent years, particularly since the increased planting of ultrasusceptible semidwarf cultivars. Farmers are wanting to know the amount of damage this increased incidence of powdery mildew is causing to winter wheat production. This is why the study on the effects of powdery mildew was initiated.

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We apologize to Dr. Williams and to our readers for the error.—*The Editors*

## Opinions Differ on the Usage of Epidemic and Epiphytotic

Quite likely for every opinion there is an opposite opinion. I cannot agree with Victor E. Green, Jr., (PLANT DISEASE, June 1981, page 459) that the adoption of such terms as *phytomass* and *epiphytotic* is desirable. For years we have complained that the public does not understand us and our activities. Part of the reason may be that excessive jargon has made reports of our work unintelligible to anyone who has not learned the secret signs and symbols.

I believe semanticists generally agree that in English the meaning of words derives in part from the context. The likelihood of misinterpreting the word *epidemic* in a plant disease context is remote. Since even *phytomass* is not unambiguous without qualifications (does it include algae? fungi? bacteria?

slime molds?), why not qualify the term *biomass* and spare ourselves another bit of obfuscating verbiage.

Finally, if we sanctify (figuratively) the roots of our words, we preclude language evolution. If one argues seriously for adherence to the literal meaning of roots, then one might question the use in a letter of such terms as *rampant* (climbing), *alligator* (lizard), *journal* (daily), and *mass* (that which adheres together like dough, probably from an earlier root meaning *barley cake*).

Our real purpose in writing is communication. If we can communicate clearly by extending the meaning of familiar words, let's do so. The meaning of *plant disease epidemic* is just as precise as the meaning of *plant disease epiphytotic* and it is almost certainly understandable to a much larger audience.

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I fully concur with Victor E. Green, Jr., on the use of the term *epiphytotic* in phytopathological literature (PLANT DISEASE, June 1981, page 459). Some time age I wrote to *Phytopathology* pointing out that the term *epiphytotic* instead of *epidemic* should be used by plant pathologists. The editor took the liberal position that the terms are interchangeable. Both terms refer to disease status and both derive from the Greek language. Their etymology is as follows: *Epi–demic* (on, upon–demos, people); *Epi–phyto* (on, upon–phyton, plant).

Others before Dr. Green and me have also pointed out the erroneous use of the term *epidemic* in plant literature. PLANT DISEASE should not perpetuate an error, that is, use of the term *epidemic* instead of *epiphytotic*.

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Victor E. Green, Jr., in his letter in the June 1981 issue of PLANT DISEASE (page 459), faults the use of the word *epidemic* in plant pathology. The matter was settled long ago. Nonetheless, a similar letter appeared in *Phytopathology* in 1978 (C. C. Ryan and R. G. Birch, Letter to the Editor, page 681). In his generous answer in the same issue (R. L. Millar, Letter from the Editor, page 682), the

editor of that journal provided lasting documentation.

Dr. Green must probe more deeply into the meanings of *demos* and *deme*. He'll find they refer to a populace (people) or a population (of any organism). Witness the deme concept as used in systematics, evolution, and population biology.

Epidemiology is the study of disease behavior in populations (of humans, animals, or plants) and epidemic is the right word, noun and adjective.

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## Capital Letters for Logo, to Lend Dignity and Pride

I like the contents of PLANT DISEASE; in fact I could well say I enjoy it. On the other hand, I get very distressed when I look at the front page and there in large letters is *plant disease*; then on the Editorial Board page, too, I see *plant disease, an international journal of applied plant pathology*.

Surely if we want to be proud of our journal we should use *capital letters* for the title of the journal and when we speak of an international journal. I realize newspapers forget capitals, divide words without regard to syllables, and advertise so-called bathing suits consisting really of nothing but a G-string and a bra that cover little. *But* are we, the most theoretical of the applied botanical sciences, to slip into the class of newspapers with the unesthetic presentations?

My answer is an *unqualified no*.

Certainly the cost of a few capitals to lend dignity to our publication is not too great a price to pay for a little dignity and pride.

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