

# The Obligation of Scientific Societies to Publish

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The title of this editorial was assigned to me. I don't like it—the *obligation* of the American Phytopathological Society to publish. Among the definitions of obligation are: a duty imposed legally or socially, result of a contract, promise, moral responsibility. Article I of the APS Constitution states that the object of the Society is "to promote the increase and diffusion of all aspects of knowledge relating to plant diseases and their control." To fulfill this, we really are *obligated* to foster publications. How better

can we actively diffuse and maintain knowledge of plant diseases and their control? Why is the word "obligated" objectionable? Because it is better to look upon publication as an opportunity, a privilege, and a source of pride.

The founders of the Society began to diffuse information by initiating annual meetings and, with growth, divisional meetings. If all the Society did was hold annual meetings, it would be justified and would serve a useful purpose. In our infancy, some plant pathologists worked alone in a state, and even today some work in relative isolation. What an advantage it must have been to gather together to become acquainted, to exchange ideas and techniques, and to develop cooperation. Or even to engage in disputes that led to further investigation and reexamination. But these brief and stimulating experiences cannot substitute for the written word.

*Phytopathology* was our pillar of strength for years (it still is). It unified the profession. It was one of the leading agricultural journals of the world. It would be interesting to start with Volume 1 and list the major advances reported in it in sequence. This journal has always more than paid expenses. It has sustained many lesser activities.

Publication of the Classics has always required subsidy. But who among us has not marveled at the accomplishments of Tillet or Beijerinck? Who would make these works available if we didn't? We need something to inspire us. We are not obligated to publish the Classics. We have gone beyond obligation.

Like the Classics series, we have lost money on the Monographs. When the Monographs were started, my enthusiasm was high. When they failed to pay their way, I opposed them. As the series grows, it becomes more useful and serves a real purpose. If we can afford it, this series should be continued. Publication today is dominated by short, single-aspect research. The Monographs bring the many minor contributions together in a synthesized whole.

The extension specialists initiated the Disease Compendium series. This series brings together information about a major crop. It is useful to us, to students, and, more important, to many outside our profession.

The Society should be proud of saving *Plant Disease Reporter*. The special features of *PLANT DISEASE* that summarize successes in disease control are of great value in teaching. They also honor practitioners of the science and art of plant pathology who actually helped to control diseases. In teaching, we all strive to impart understanding of diseases. Those who contribute most to understanding are those engaged in "basic" studies. We often spend 50 minutes of a lecture on *Fusarium* wilts on basic information, and maybe 2 minutes stating that resistant varieties are the main control. This bias overlooks the fact that some workers spend much of their lives

in "routine," "mundane" testing that results in little scientific glory. The features help to redress inequities of this sort (fungicide tests might even rank lower than varietal testing?). And while on the subject of *PLANT DISEASE*, let it not become too "scientific." We need a place to publish observations.

Back to the real question: Why does our Society publish? For me, the most important reason is purely selfish. It saves me time and keeps me better informed. Go back in your mind to before we had *Phytopathology*. Works on *Fusarium* wilt were published mainly in state experimental station bulletins of some type. To review the literature, how many sources did you peruse? And if you think *Phytopathology* is slow, how long did your library take to get all these bulletins from far-flung sources? Articles on plant pathology were bound together in *Phytopathology*, not sandwiched between dairy production and soil physics.

As a senior member of our Society, I find the increased specialization of workers and the increased number of scientific journals somewhat disturbing. We gain when *Phytopathology* and *PLANT DISEASE* contain articles reporting work on diseases incited by nematodes, bacteria, fungi, and viruses and on the causal agents themselves. We gain when our journals contain physiology. By not becoming narrow in scope, our journals will help us not become too narrow. By containing articles on all aspects of plant pathology, *Phytopathology* and *PLANT DISEASE* will aid us in understanding our colleagues and in benefiting from their special talents and training.

The Canadian Phytopathological Society recently launched the *Canadian Journal of Plant Pathology*. From a selfish standpoint, this is just another journal to have to examine. But it is a journal of quality, and the members of the Canadian Phytopathological Society are strengthened by it.

Prophets proclaim the coming of computerized publication, advances making journals obsolete. Myopia prevents me from seeing advantages. Illustrations would be a problem. What about the pride of authorship? What about the satisfaction of seeing a good piece of work? I treasure old reprints by H. L. Bolley, T. Johnson, E. C. Stakman, J. G. Dickson, and others. Do we wish to see this end?

Scientific results should be published. Why not let the research institutions have this responsibility? You studied the multiplication of a bacterium in a tobacco plant—about a three-page effort. Experimental institution X publishes it and does what with it? To achieve what circulation? To whom? At what cost? Publishing it in a proper journal records it and distributes it to an appropriate audience for a trivial cost. Page charges for the three-page article constitute a real bargain and service to the sponsoring agency. The page charge would probably not even cover the costs of starting to print it, let alone buy the paper, address it, and mail it.

Why should societies publish the research of its own members? Why not let private enterprise do the entire job? In general, the private journals charge libraries far more for journals than we do. The libraries are essentially forced by our needs to buy these products. But libraries are fast approaching or already at the point at which they will have to begin to eliminate journals from their subscription lists. The escalating costs cannot be sustained. Discontinued and incomplete journal accessions are a handicap. The Society has assumed an obligation to maintain a continuous outlet for the publications of all its members. This assurance is important.

Another facet to societal publication is that it is under our control. It is our responsibility, both for financial support and for quality. This is not to imply that journals not controlled by scientific societies are inferior. It is only to say we have an outlet that is ours. If societies quit publishing entirely there would be no "competition," and who can foresee the outcome? This argument may appear weak, but it should be considered.