Letters

Scientists Have Need for a Second Language

I have reviewed with interest the comments by Dennis E. Mayhew in the June 1983 issue of PLANT DISEASE (page 593) and would comment that I cannot agree with his posture that a pathologist or any other individual working in a scientific discipline is not in need of a second language.

Many years ago I was engaged in a program in Japan concerning the *Xanthomonas citri* disease, and I found that the Japanese language indeed was most difficult to learn, apart from the usual useful phrases. On the other hand, on innumerable occasions I was able to utilize my limited French because the Japanese with whom I was engaged in conversation had learned their French at school. We spoke slowly, giving each other the opportunity to understand one another without the difficulties normally encountered in attempting to converse with one whose native tongue is French.

I had the same experience in Italy, where my nonexistent knowledge of the Italian language was saved on occasion by the fact that I could converse, albeit limitedly, in French with those who likewise had this as a second language.

I am currently a member of a committee of an international organization with representatives from all over the world, and I am continually chagrined by the fact that individuals from these varied countries have no difficulty whatsoever in conversing with each other in several languages, while we, the representatives from the United States, are strictly limited.

Those who have traveled or worked in the Netherlands are well aware of the fact that the average individual in that country speaks three languages—and many speak five—with no detrimental effect on their abilities in their chosen disciplines of science, law, or industry.

I have never felt that an individual must be limited to expertise in one discipline alone, and I am sure that this has equal application to the question of languages.

Stuart W. Turner
Stuart W. Turner & Co., Inc.
Consulting Agrologists
Bainbridge Island, WA