

## An Editorial Perspective on PLANT DISEASE

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With this issue, PLANT DISEASE begins its 10th year of publication and its fourth 3-year cycle of senior editorship. At the changing of the editorial watch, it is necessary to examine how the journal responds to its mission and serves its clientele. We share now some facts and opinions gained during the examination or carried forward from previous experience.

Conceived in the late 1970s and launched in 1980, PLANT DISEASE represented a bold new communication effort for the American Phytopathological Society (APS). Instead of merely publishing applied research

(which was and is its primary function), the new journal also included sections intended to be useful to extension specialists, field advisors, students, and workers in agricultural industry, including those in other fields allied with plant pathology. Feature articles were the most prominent of the new sections. Their color illustrations and attractive layout made them popular with teachers and extension workers. New diseases and unusual epidemics were reported in a special section, and a Focus page contained brief notes extracted from the world literature of plant pathology. (Focus has always been authored anonymously by Thor Kommedahl, to whom we now express gratitude.) Editorials and Letters appeared, and categorical pages were developed for Disease Notes, Fungicide and Nematicide Update, Industry News, Product and Equipment News, and Spotlight on Diagnosis. Significant communications, such as summaries of commodity losses, that would not fit in regular categories were accommodated as Special Reports. That PLANT DISEASE has such diverse functions, yet has built scientific credibility and maintained a subscription list of more than 4,650 entries, is a tribute to its planners and past editors.

The editorial team of PLANT DISEASE changes annually with the appointment (by APS Council) of one-third of the associate editors and part of the Advisory Board for 3-year terms. The team changes markedly every 3 years with the appointment of new senior editors and the editor-in-chief. Former senior and chief editors and some members of the Advisory Board have individually donated many hundreds of hours to the tasks of reviewing and editing manuscripts and supervising the quality of the peer review process. We extend hearty thanks, on behalf of authors and readers, to former Editor-in-Chief C. Wendell Horne, former Senior Editors Richard H. Converse, William R. Jarvis, William L. MacDonald, Wayne L. Pedersen, Rodrigo Rodriguez-Kabana, and John E. Watkins, and former Advisory Board members Patrick Fenn and Raymond D. Martyn for their efforts during 1986–1988. They have served authors and APS with consistency and impartiality. We also gratefully acknowledge the reviews provided by the Associate Editors whose terms ended during 1986–1988.

The mission of PLANT DISEASE, as framed by its planners, is to promote "the exchange and dissemination of new information on the management and control of plant diseases." The planners hoped the journal would be read not only by plant pathologists but by other scientific and technical personnel concerned with prevention and suppression of crop losses. Diverse readership was sought through advertising and was, for

a time, reflected by the subscription roster, but now only about 10% of individual subscriptions are held by people other than members of APS. Perhaps this narrowing of the readership was to be expected, because no journal that represents primarily one field of scientific expertise can be consistently useful to people employed in other fields.

It has been suggested that PLANT DISEASE fails to communicate effectively with some potential readers—e.g., extension agents and growers—because the journal uses technical terms, units of measurement, and generic names of pesticides that are unfamiliar to untrained readers. We offer no rebuttal to this suggestion, but we assert that standard technical terms, international units of measurement (units in the S.I. system), and generic names of pesticides are necessary for effective international communication and for credibility with scientific readers. Furthermore, a style and format similar to the current one may be essential for scientific credibility. No precedent supports the idea that one journal can maintain excellence in the publication of original research as well as in the translation of that research into practical messages for lay audiences.

We are curious about two trends in the use of PLANT DISEASE by readers and authors. While the number of APS members increased some 21% to approximately 4,200 between 1980 and 1987, the number of members subscribing to PLANT DISEASE declined nearly 7%, from a high of 3,405 in 1983 to 3,171 in 1988. Perhaps more significant, the number of research manuscripts submitted for publication declined from approximately 500 per year in the early 1980s to 388 (plus 100 Disease Notes) in 1987. The number of manuscripts accepted for publication declined similarly, from an average of 339 per year during 1981–1983 to 255 in 1987. (In recent years, the acceptance rate for research manuscripts, including those for New Diseases and Epidemics, has been near 67% and that for Disease Notes, near 72%.)

The reasons for these trends are not readily apparent. Are fewer people professionally involved with applied plant pathology? Is less field-oriented research being performed than was the case several years ago? Partial answers may come from demographic data compiled from the recent survey of APS members. We look forward to commentary, in this space, about the results of the survey. Another possible explanation for the decline in use of PLANT DISEASE is that during the 1980s, North American plant pathologists have submitted an increasing proportion of their reports of applied research to journals allied with agricultural commodities and with professional societies other than APS. Diversity among the journals publishing applied plant pathology is useful, we think, and with such diversity now established, we anticipate stabilization of PLANT DISEASE's share of the research manuscripts received for publication.

The trends just discussed indicate no lack of vitality in PLANT DISEASE. Indeed, it published some 1,152 pages, of which 877 were research, in the most recent fiscal year. The interval between initial receipt of a manuscript and its return to the author with reviews and editorial recommendations averaged 5.5 weeks, and the interval between acceptance of a manuscript and its publication averaged 5.4 months. Thus, the editorial and production processes were functioning smoothly. The editors and production staff are committed to improving the procedures and technical quality of the journal, however, and invite suggestions to that end. Authors, especially APS members, are invited to consider submitting their reports of applied phytopathological research to PLANT DISEASE, because it offers a rigorous review process for contributed manuscripts, high editorial standards, and international circulation.