



## Quarterly Comments

### from the APPS President

I recently had the pleasure of visiting colleagues at the Centre for Tropical Agriculture in Mareeba, far North Queensland, and was briefed on the response to the incursion by the Black Sigatoka fungus in bananas at Tully. I consider this to be a benchmark response for such an incursion. It involved an initial massive surveillance program to define the extent of the outbreak followed by a carefully planned eradication program. The final phase is being implemented, The Black Sigatoka Area Freedom Program. All survey data to date indicates the eradication program has been



successful but further surveys are necessary through the coming wet season for verification. The remarkable commitment given to this program by Ron Peterson, the Technical Manager, and all the members of a very large team is a credit to our profession of plant pathology and is to be commended.

*Lester Burgess*

**International Congress of Plant Pathology, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2 – 7 February 2003**

Late Registration (received after 31 October 2002) NZ\$1300

[www.lincoln.ac.nz/icpp2003/](http://www.lincoln.ac.nz/icpp2003/)  
see page 7 for more details

## **STILL WANTED: VISITING SCIENTIST INFORMATION**

The visiting scientist site on the APPS web page has been running for over a year now, so far with limited input. The intention is to make available this information for anyone who may wish to contact these scientists (via the person they will be visiting), perhaps to arrange a visit or a seminar.

This will only work if the information is available, so could anyone with visiting scientists please email the required information to the web manager, Peter Williamson (businessmanager@ australasianplantpathologysociety.org.au).



### **Notes from the Editor**

Another year gone in rapid fashion! Thanks to all the contributors of the newsletter over that year. And please keep those articles coming. I am still looking for pictures as fillers. Either sketches that can be scanned (preferably without copyright!) or electronic versions.

Hope to see you all in Christchurch. Best wishes for the season.

***Barbara Hall***

## REGIONAL NEWS

### The SA branch ponders..... To eat or not to eat?



To celebrate National Science Week, the SA branch in conjunction with The University of Adelaide conducted a hypothetical which aimed to educate people about the role that plant pathology plays in society – a role that often goes unnoticed in day-to-day living yet its contributions are quite significant and impact heavily. The hypothetical focused on pesticides, genetically modified organisms, conventional breeding and organic control measures. Amanda Able, Eileen Scott and Ian Ryley (The University of Adelaide), Ian Dry (CSIRO), Barbara Hall and Hugh Wallwork (SARDI) mostly wrote the script with some input from other members based at the Waite. Professor Rob Morrison (previously of the Curiosity Show) then presented this script (with some changes including jokes!) to the audience of 131 with a panel consisting of Professor Edwina Cornish (The University of Adelaide), David Bruer (Temple Bruer Wines), Ian Henschke (ABC Statewide), Belinda Rawnsley (SARDI), Professor Rick Roush (CRC for Weed Management), Dr Hugh Wallwork (SARDI, CRC for Molecular Plant Breeding) and Amy Withers (Scotch College).

The hypothetical described the inadvertent introduction of a superpathogen *Lergyospora disasterii* by the Prime Minister in an old Greek vase and its effect on agriculture (I have copies of the script if anyone is interested). In response to this pathogen, each member of the panel was called on to describe how they would deal with certain issues. Some of the more prickly questions that Rob asked panel members included:

1. How do you identify a pathogen and what options do you have?

2. Ian Henschke was asked about the media approach to only fielding scientific disasters such as an organic mite treatment for the super pathogen that caused asthma (in the hypothetical).
3. Edwina was also asked about 'patent or publish' outlook as well as what would happen with regards to licensing of technologies that infringed on biotechnological multinational giants.
4. Ric addressed how risk assessments for GM foods happen.
5. Amy was asked as a consumer what she'd buy, given the choice.

After the fun of the hypothetical, the floor was opened and many questions fielded. The event was a huge success in terms of achieving its main aim of education. Many retirees from the plant pathology field and widows of some of our former members were also present allowing us to keep a link with the past while looking to the future. We also have a higher profile in SA now with the event and the field of plant pathology being discussed in several forums in the lead up to the event including ABC National Radio and ABC TV. I would also like to thank give all the SA branch members that helped a huge pat on the back – a job well done.

By the time society members read this newsletter the SA branch will also have held its annual postgraduate prize day and BBQ – a day supported partially by Crown Scientific.

*Amanda Able*

## QUEENSLAND

### Maroochy Research Station Field Day (22 August 2002)

Despite the pouring rain a good day was had by all. Thank you to Don Hutton and Apollo Gomez for organising the day, with special thanks going to Apollo for chopping up all of those fabulous strawberries to have with ice cream for lunch!

Mike Smith (Centre Leader, MRS) who briefly introduced the group to the broad range of activities currently carried out at Maroochy. The main crops worked on at the centre are bananas, macadamia nuts, mangoes, pineapples, and strawberries. The type of work ranges from plant pathology, tissue culture and molecular biology, to the development of integrated crop protection programs, including the development of management systems such as MacMan and AvoMan.

The formal talks for the day included:

**Mike Smith**

The Trials and Tribulations of Tissue Culture induced clean planting material (bananas).

**Garth Sanewski**

Development of a screening test for genetic resistance to *Phytophthora cinnamomi* in pineapple.

**Peter Hoffman**

Other approaches to disease control in mangoes and avocados.

**Geoff Waite**

Unravelling vector and alternative host secrets of strawberry lethal yellows and associated phytoplasmas & rickettsias.

**Don Hutton**

Current status of MB replacement technology in strawberries.

**Bob Nissen**

Total exclusion netting for insect pest control in fruit trees.



Unfortunately the field walk planned for the afternoon session had to be cancelled due to the shortage of snorkels and flippers available, fortunately Don and Apollo just kept the strawberries coming!

*Christine Horlock*



### **Bob Davis Retires after 34 years with the QDPI**

Bob Davis retired from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries on the 7 August 2002 after 34 years of meritorious service to both the Department and the primary producers of Queensland.

Bob has certainly lead a distinguished career, beginning with his service in Mareeba where he became involved in the development of disease control programs for tobacco and peanuts, two of the major industries in the area at that time. In 1978, while still located at Mareeba Bob commenced detailed studies on anthracnose of *Stylosanthes*, a disease that threatened this key legume component of beef pastures across northern Australia. Bob's work on *Stylosanthes*, in collaboration with Dr John Irwin and scientists in CSIRO, gained

international recognition. A Churchill Fellowship was awarded to Bob in 1987 which enabled him to spend several months with pasture scientists in South America and Florida. Later in 1989 he assisted scientists at Queens University, Belfast in identifying diversity among a world collection of anthracnose pathogen.

Bob was transferred to the Indooroopilly Research Centre in 1990. While working on vegetable disease problems, Bob completed a Master's degree which elucidated the etiology of the leaf curl disease of celery. From 1993 to 1997 he contributed valuable skills and experience to fruit pathology research and then became involved in research into the recently detected Fusarium wilt disease of cotton.

In 1996 he rejoined the vegetable group and established a new laboratory at Gatton Research Station, the new headquarters for vegetable pathology in Queensland. He served as the Professional Development Leader for Plant Pathology within the Queensland Horticulture Institute (QHI) from 1998-2000,

while enthusiastically leading the Vegetable Pathology Team. His final projects were directed at disease problems in onion (white rot) and asparagus (rust).

At his send off, the Director of QHI, Mr Grant Hall said, "During your career you have shown dedication, commitment and integrity in all your tasks. You are recognised as a dedicated and valuable officer by your colleagues, industry leaders and the many primary producers you have helped.

You have shown the qualities required to be both a team member and effective leader. Your knowledge, experience and selflessness will be sorely missed by your colleagues".

On behalf of the wider Plant Pathology community, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Bob for his valuable contribution to our discipline. Everyone from the DPI wishes Bob the very best in his well-earned retirement and every success in his new career as a lime grower.

*Rob O'Brien and Denis Persley*



## **XI INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON BIOLOGICAL CONTROL OF WEEDS 27 APRIL - 2 MAY 2003**

The XI International Symposium on Biological Control of Weeds is being held in Canberra, Australia, from Sunday 27 April - Friday 2 May 2003. The importance of ecology as the underpinning discipline for biological control is the emphasis for this symposium. Information on the symposium, including cost of registration and deadline for abstracts, can be found at

<http://www.ento.csiro.au/weeds2003/index.html>

# News from the Editor-in-Chief of Australasian Plant Pathology:

## The APP Editors Inkwell

Good communication is fundamental in science. Our journal *Australasian Plant Pathology* ['our' because it belongs to each member of the Society], reports plant health research to the wider world. Plant diseases are, however, usually of little interest to people outside the profession or to the grower or industry being affected by a particular disease. Occasionally they awaken wider interest.

I spent some time in the USA in July and August and one could not fail to notice the impact that the events of 11 September 2001 had on the whole population. Patriotic signs [the best I saw was in Texas: "Terrorists, don't mess with Texas – remember the Alamo", as if every Al Qaeda member studies Mexican history] adorn cars, homes, footpaths and even giant bill boards, along with the plethora of flags that have always been a part of American patriotism. The relevance of this to the science of plant pathology is the USA Patriot Act of 2001 signed into law in October 2001. Parts of the Act serve to establish specific requirements designed to control the use of biohazardous agents listed by the Centres for Disease Control as 'select agents'. The Act also provides a mechanism for the identification of 'restricted persons' who are prohibited from having access to 'selective (sic) agents'. The list of plant pathogens is interesting and I suspect from the spelling and organisms listed that experienced plant pathologists had little input into compiling the list. People who work with any of these organisms have to be registered and have their lab inspected yearly to conform to biosafety standards. The compliance questionnaire has some interesting questions, "Are you an illegal alien", "Are you a fugitive from justice", "Have you been adjudicated a mental defective", which are unlikely to protect agriculture from those who have terrorist intentions. You can imagine a would-be criminal clamouring to answer 'yes' to any of these.

Communication seems to have suffered in the knee jerk response although there has been an attempt to place some rationality into the debate (see <http://www.apsnet.org/online/feature/bioterrorism/>). The attitude among some pathologists with whom I met was one of despair at the effect this would have on normal plant pathology research and one senior pathologist said he would probably abandon his research on rice blast because it wasn't worth the cost and paper warfare involved.

The Society has joined Plant Health Australia as an associate member. I hope that this will facilitate communication with active pathologists in matters affecting national response to issues involving plant health. Informed discussion and access to expert advice can assist communication between government and scientists for the benefit of all.

*Ric Cother*

**International Congress of Plant Pathology, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2 – 7 February 2003  
Christchurch Convention Centre & Town Hall**

The number of persons registered as at 4 November is 1200, a good response from the world community of plant pathologists. All of the workshops have been well supported and it is expected that all will take place on the announced day or days. The numbers vary from 26 up to 88 per workshop. The DIAG workshop “Developing a world class plant pathology network” will take place post-congress on Saturday 8 February from 10 am till 6 p.m. at the University of Canterbury. Plant Health Australia will cover the registration costs for APPS members. Members must register direct with Helen Shrewsbury shrewsbh@lincoln.ac.nz or icpp@lincoln.ac.nz & state that they are an APPS member. There is only space for 110 persons, first come first served. At present there is 711 persons coming to the barbecue on Wednesday 5 February while there is 628 taking part in the dinner on Friday 7 February. It is likely that all of the post-congress tours will be cancelled.

***XI-th International Congress on Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions  
July 18-27, 2003, St.-Petersburg, Russia***

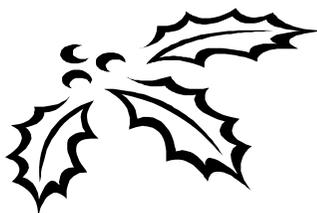
The International Society for Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions and the National Organizing Committee are pleased to announce that the XI-th International Congress on Molecular Plant-Microbe Interactions will take place on July 18-27, 2003 in St.-Petersburg, Russia. The congress will be over 6 working days - 2 days will be devoted to plenary lectures and 4 days to parallel symposia. The Cultural Program will include sightseeing of St.-Petersburg, performance(s) and post-Congress tours.

For further information please go to the web site: <http://www.arriam.spb.ru/mpmi>

**NOTES FROM THE WEB**

**a small web article of interest**

<http://www.new-agri.co.uk/02-2/develop/dev05.html>



## New Members

On behalf of the Society, the Management Committee would like to welcome the following new members:

QLD: Dr Ipek Kurtboke  
Mrs Susan Porchun  
Ms Karen Kretschmann (student)

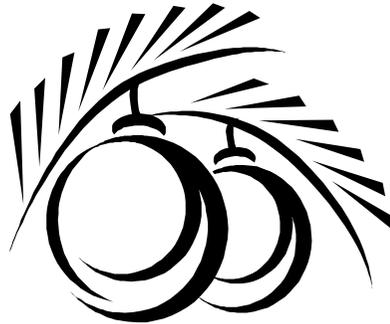
VIC: Mr Donald Gardiner (student)  
Ms Megan Hewett (student)  
Ms Noushka Reiter (student)

WA: Ms Sarah Jackson (student)

## Don't forget to have your say!

This is your newsletter so be sure to let us know what is going on about:

- \* Open days and field days
- \* Scholarships and employment opportunities
- \* Regional news
- \* Special interest groups
- \* Requests for information etc.
- \* Upcoming events
- \* Awards to members
- \* Issues of concern
- \* Humorous events



### WANTED: SNIPPETS OF INTERESTING INFORMATION

It has been suggested that interesting or "off the wall" techniques people have tried in their experiments that may or may not have succeeded, might be shared with others that may find a use for them. Any of these you are willing to share with us can be forwarded to the editor, hall.barbara@saugov.sa.gov.au.

APPS NEWS is the official newsletter of the Australasian Plant Pathology Society, published quarterly. Items for inclusion should be sent to Mrs B. Hall, Plant Research Centre, SARDI, GPO Box 397, Adelaide, SA. 5001. Ph. 08 8303 9562, Fax 08 8303 9393, Email: hall.barbara@saugov.sa.gov.au. **Next deadline: 3 February 2003.** Editor-in-Chief APP: Dr Eric Cother, NSW Agriculture, Orange Agricultural Institute, Forest Road, Orange, 2800. Ph. 02 6391 3886, Fax 02 6391 3899, E-mail: ric.cother@agric.nsw.gov.au

Web Site: (<http://www.australasianplantpathologysociety.org.au/>)