

Summary of
Southern Plant Diagnostic Network Regional Meeting
National Plant Disease and Pest Diagnostic Network
October 31-November 1, 2002
Atlanta, GA

The Southern Plant Diagnostic Network met to discuss plans for development of a network for detecting plant diseases and pests, including potential bioterrorism agents, that could threaten our agriculture. Attendees included extension specialists, diagnosticians, Information Technology personnel, and administrators. To begin, each state in the region gave a short presentation on the pests they identify (diseases, insects, nematodes, and/or weeds), diagnostic equipment used, clientele, etc. Many labs have a system in place for reporting exotics or pests of concern to their state Dept. of Agriculture and NAPIS, some labs do not.

The initial phase involves Information Technology (IT) development. IT representatives discussed the plans for building a regional database of pest information. Diagnostic labs in each state in the southern region will contribute information to this database, and information on critical pests will be relayed to the national center (NAPIS database). Restrictions for data entering NAPIS already exist, but we have not finalized the criteria for pest information entering the regional database. The IT personnel are working on this regional database and how to link existing diagnostic lab databases to it.

The next phase will be diagnostic improvement and training. We would like to develop training modules for all states in the region, both for training people in the diagnostic labs and for people on the "front line" (county extension agents, Master Gardeners, nursery inspectors, pest control operators, pest scouts, etc.). Work will continue on developing lists of key crops, key pests, and lists of experts qualified to identify certain organisms. Profile sheets should be developed for each of the key potential pests.

There was some discussion on the budget. Each state is to submit a mini-grant (\$25,000 each) by Nov. 15 for IT development and improving their diagnostic labs.

There will be a meeting of the National Plant Disease and Pest Diagnostic Network on Nov. 19-21 in Washington D.C. The purpose of this meeting will be to develop the framework for a national work plan for the Network.

More information on the Southern Plant Diagnostic Network can be found at the UF Dept. of Plant Pathology homepage at <http://plantpath.ifas.ufl.edu/>

written by Lyle Buss, Insect Identification Lab, Univ. of Florida, Gainesville