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A plant expert on how he is reaching the public and policy makers with his research



The Source

By: Guest contributor, Sun Aug 22 2021

At Springer Nature, we are committed to bridging the gap between research and policymaking by helping researchers increase the societal impact of their work. As part of our [SDG15 hub \(/gp/researchers/sdg-programme/sdg15\)](/gp/researchers/sdg-programme/sdg15) launch, dedicated to life on land, we asked several experts how they work to make sure their related research is reaching those that need it most to make urgent decisions when it comes to the future of our planet. (https://www.springernature.com/gp/researchers/the-source?utm_source=the_source_blogs&utm_medium=referral&utm_content=null&utm_campaign=CMTL_5_RS01_Source_newsletter_signup_button_blog%20origin#c16960706)



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What is the focus of your research and how is it related to SDG15?

I am interested in understanding the emergence of novel plant diseases and their effect on plant survival and on biodiversity. Humans depend on plants for survival and the globe needs plants to maintain functional ecological processes. Emergent diseases can wipe out entire plant communities with cascading effects on human well being and our planet resiliency. Until recently our main target was represented by the study of exotic plant diseases mostly introduced by trade, but we also focusing now on diseases that are becoming increasingly emergent because of climate change. These diseases represent an even more formidable foe.

How important is societal impact to your research? Why?

My goal is to provide practical answers based on science in what we can do to protect plants both in agriculture and in natural systems. It is key my information reaches stakeholders and is not simply buried in a research journal.

What do you believe are the most effective ways of communicating your

research?

I found that a two level approach is very beneficial. I work closely with mainstream media to communicate my results to the public. This has to be done regularly to achieve an impact. On the other hand I also try to reach policy makers and managers directly through more focused programs using RoundTables and the web and more sector publications.

Who do you prioritize reaching and why? i.e.: policymakers, educators, health professionals, the general public, etc.

I like to prioritize both the public and the specific stakeholders in this case land managers and policymakers. I am an incredible fan and activist in Citizen Science.

What advice do you have for researchers who are looking for ways to make societal impact, in other words, impact beyond their scholarly circle/academia?

My experience was not to listen to what the Universities tell you about working with the media. Be yourself and develop an honest relationship with writers and journalists rather than being secretive and on guard all the time. A sound, honest professional relationship will make writers trust you and reach out to you. Do not be afraid of presenting controversial results if they are sound and proven.

[Visit Springer Nature's SDG15 hub now](https://www.springernature.com/gp/researchers/the-source/blog/blogposts-communicating-research/plant-expert-reaching-public-and-policy-makers-wi...) (/a

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About Matteo Garbelotto

Matteo Garbelotto established and directs the U. C. Berkeley Forest Pathology and Mycology Laboratory which provides research, diagnostic and forensic services regarding the health and stability of trees and forests in

California. He is also a professor of Forest Pathology at U. C. Berkeley and specializes in the population dynamics and epidemiology of emergent forest diseases, including those caused by exotic pathogens. He routinely provides recommendations for the correct management of woodlands and has advised multiple governments regarding the diagnosis and management of invasive forest diseases. He was instrumental in the process leading to the first ever adoption of molecular based diagnostics for the official detection of a regulated plant pathogen. Since 2007, he has been organizing the California Sudden Oak Death Blitzes, one of the oldest and most successful citizen science projects in the world. In January of 2020, he became the Editor in Chief of the Journal of Plant Pathology, the oldest International Journal in the field.



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