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# Elevating regional significance and growing regional research communities



The Source

By: Matteo Garbelotto, Fri Jun 28 2024

At the *Journal of Plant Pathology*, the Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Matteo Garbelotto has put in place a series of initiatives to elevate regional significance of research considered by the journal, provide language support to authors, mentor early career researchers, and diversify editorial boards.



Author: Matteo Garbelotto

Tell us a little bit about your journal – it's vision, scope and authorship base.

The *Journal of Plant Pathology (JPPY)* (<https://link.springer.com/journal/42161/aims-and-scope>) publishes articles dealing with plant health issues as the result of interactions between virulent plant pathogens, susceptible hosts and environmental factors. Lately, an increasing number of submissions covers issues related to the global movement of pathogens and to the emergence of novel diseases driven by climate change. The JPPY is the oldest plant pathology publication in the world that broadly addresses all topics in the field. Given the importance of agriculture and forestry, plant pathology is a very

competitive field and there is a robust number of publications on the subject. In spite of the competitive environment, the JPPY has emerged as one of the most diverse journals both in terms of topics and in terms of geographic background of the authorship and readership. In fact, our authorship and readership are more diverse than I have experienced with other plant pathology journals. While the dominance of China and India in usage was expected, in 2020, the combined usage by Africa, the Middle East and Latin America was a whopping 32%, more than the usage of 26% by North America and Europe combined.

**So, your journal has taken a deliberate set of actions to address diversity, and inclusion in the journal. Tell us about what you did and why you felt addressing these issues was an important step for the journal.**

When I stepped in as an EiC, my first priority was to broaden and update the topics covered by the journal by creating new types of submissions and by increasing the size of the Editorial Board. My second priority was to raise the bar on the quality of the English and on the organization of papers. At that point, together with some of the Senior Editors, I saw the expanding global reach of the journal, both in authorship and readership, as a major opportunity to serve the needs of plant pathology researchers worldwide, especially in parts of the world that are generally underserved by research publishing. To further this goal, I focused on four major areas:

- ① **Diversifying editorial boards:** We further diversified our board to include editors from these underrepresented regions of the world. This was a crucial step to ensure that we were able to increase visibility for the journal within these research communities.
- ② **Providing language support:** To improve the English for worthy manuscripts, an initial editorial rejection was supported by language guidance by both Associate and Senior Editors to improve resubmitted manuscripts. This took about 30-40 minutes per manuscript but ultimately resulted in converting these manuscripts into quality submissions for the journal.
- ③ **Elevating regional significance:** We clarified that the JPPY is interested in publishing research that represents a novelty at the regional level; this was a major shift in policy from previously requiring research to have global novelty. For example, we published a study showing detection of Huanglongbing disease, its insect vectors and nutritional profile of citrus in Upper Awash, Ethiopia, which has regional significance. We also started an "Editors' Choice" section at the beginning of each issue that allows us to showcase the best that JPPY has to offer from diverse parts of the world.
- ④ **Mentoring Early Career Researchers:** More recently, the JPPY has focused on mentoring and integrating Early Career Researchers. We implemented a multi-prong approach that included an Annual Special Topic Issue

included: a) An annual Special Issue titled: "Fresh Ideas in plant health: the latest research from young plant pathologists"; b) Establishing a Young Editorial Board for researchers who are either complete graduate work or 2 years out from obtaining their PhD. Members of the Young Editorial Board are tapped for reviews of papers submitted to the Special Issue and vice versa, researchers publishing papers in the Special Issue are automatically offered a position in the Young Editorial Board; c) We appointed an experienced Editor as Senior Editor for the Special issue; d) We established an annual cash prize for two-four deserving young researchers.

## **What is the impact on the journal of these actions?**

I was really impressed to see that our efforts to be more inclusive of regional diversity were met with great enthusiasm both by the editorial board and by the worldwide authorship. Submissions from Latin America, Africa and the Middle East account for more than 40% of submissions in 2023. Additionally, the quality of the manuscripts from these underrepresented regions has improved considerably. The Editors' Choice section features diverse research and has served to foster diversity and to position the journal as inclusive. The efforts aimed at young researchers has been a smashing success: after a few months, we have 13 papers under review and 16 papers already accepted. The Young Editorial Board includes 25 members, and, in September, we will award prizes to two meritorious young researchers. It is incredibly rewarding to know that a

major international journal is successfully paying attention to underrepresented groups. I tell my colleagues that it is easy to cater to the best scientists with access to top notch resources, but it is so much more rewarding to create a channel for less fortunate researchers, so that they can shine.

## What challenges have you encountered and how have you addressed them?

Bringing top tier scientists to the editorial board has required extensive effort but our focus on diversity and a growing IF have been positive factors. Another major challenge has been convincing editorial board members that students and early career postdocs on the Young Editorial Board are qualified and sometimes more committed to perform accurate reviews than more seasoned scientists. However, the success of the initiative has helped convince skeptics.



### Author: Matteo Garbelotto

Dr. Matteo Garbelotto is Adjunct Professor in Environmental Sciences at UC Berkeley, the statewide UC Cooperative Extension Specialist in Forest Pathology, and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Plant Pathology*. At UC Berkeley, he leads the Forest Pathology and Mycology Lab, which focuses on understanding the epidemiology of infectious plant diseases in natural ecosystems and on assessing fungal biodiversity. He has collaborated with the governments of several countries to

improve food security and has been appointed to serve as an expert by the USDA APHIS, the EU EFSA and EPPO. Matteo has been recognized for his efforts in public education, and he is well known for co-discovering the pathogen responsible for Sudden Oak Death.

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