Clinic Helps Minimize Insect, Disease Damage

The Need: When faced with sudden damage to crops or ornamentals, growers need a quick, reliable way to identify the source of the problem. Without knowledge of the problem, growers cannot implement a solution to a pest or disease threat. The inability to quickly identify a problem and a method of treatment can lead to economic losses in crops and ornamental plants.

Serving the Need: Since 1951, the Plant Disease and Insect Clinic in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has been helping growers identify diseases and pests that can cause economic damage to crops and ornamentals. The clinic is responsible for diagnosis of diseases of non-commercial ornamentals and assists with diagnosis and recommendations for many commercial ornamentals as well, including most of the woody ornamentals. County centers of North Carolina Cooperative Extension often assist clients in submitting samples to the center for identification. The PDIC identifies samples for $10 each.

With the help of a $200,000 Golden LEAF grant, the clinic provided 14 county Extension centers with high-quality compound and dissecting microscopes, supplies and computer and imaging equipment that will help them create virtual plant samples. Today, 95 percent of the samples analyzed by the clinic arrive as electronic files.

Leaders of this clinic also are involved in numerous educational programs, bringing their knowledge to community college and university students, citizens, Master Gardener volunteers and government agencies.

Impact beyond North Carolina: In 2006, the PDIC processed more than 3,600 samples, identifying 1,072 insect problems, 1,468 abiotic problems and 1,609 diseases. Without the knowledge of causes and treatment for disease and insect problems, growers would have suffered extreme economic damage.

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