

# A Day in the Life of a Diagnostician

By Jeff Gregos, Department of Plant Pathology, University of Wisconsin - Madison



Recently, I read an article in *Wisconsin Golfer* titled "The Winter Question" by Monroe S. Miller (yes Monroe, we do read your articles every once in a while). This article reminded me of the question that I get from time to time: "what do you do with much of your time?" The person that I hear this from most would be Oscar Peterson, so this article is dedicated to him. I tell everyone, I have more duties than just diagnosing samples. In this article I would like to highlight many of the additional projects I am involved with.

As you probably know, much of my salary is derived from contracts to the TDDL, so it is only fitting that you know how your money is being invested. In order to describe my job responsibilities, a day wouldn't suffice, so I have included many of the important activities during a typical year.

As with most jobs, I have an annual review. However, within the University System it is a complex process, and this past year I had to develop an eight-page report. Many of you might think this is excessive. However, this is the only way that staff members have to convey their activities from the previous year to a merit review committee. This process also enables one to reflect on the previous year's accomplishments and disappointments (but we know those never get published). I view this article as an opportunity for you to have a review process of your own, since many of you contribute to the TDDL.

## January

With the WTA Turfgrass and Greenscape Expo, the beginning of the month is spent putting finishing touches on presentations and assisting in preparations

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for Expo. Another major undertaking this month is processing contracts. Contracts received are entered into a database and sample submission boxes are sent to the lab's clientele. Additionally, there are several studies underway in both the lab and the greenhouse which require constant attention.

## February

As in January, we are still heavily involved with laboratory and greenhouse research which continues until the snow melts sometime in March or April. This month is also the beginning of my travels for the year. The first trip of the year is usually to the GCSAA Conference. This is an important trip because this is where I set up most of my field research for the year, as many of my chemical representatives attend the meeting. Following GCSAA, the next task is assisting with Turfgrass Management School. Even though this is only one day of teaching, there is a fair amount of preparation required. This includes handouts and presentation preparation, along with fungi cultures and plant material for the lab section. I also spend a fair amount of time praying that we will have a long winter so that we have a good crop of snow mold this year.

## March

This is the time of year that we all start to think about getting back out into the field. It also means that the snow is starting to melt and I am back on the road again. Usually, the first trips are to Regional Turf Expos. This accounts for about a week of time traveling around the State. But this is just the beginning. With the snowmelt it is time to get up north to rate snow mold research plots. This spring means rating 17 studies or about 3,000 individual plots, and as you know from my reports these plots are rated several times in the spring.

## April

Most of April is dedicated to snow mold, with the possibility of two snow mold field days, one at the Noer and another at Sentryworld. After several trips north, a few days are spent analyzing the data and preparing the field day booklet. It is also time to start preparing research plots for the summer. This often entails establishing new plots at the Noer. Another question that Oscar asks is why I have two assistants? The simple answer to that is that the Turfgrass Pathology Program has multiple projects running concurrently, requiring the need for assistance. For example the TDDL maintains around two acres of research plot space at the Noer alone. With three-fourths of an acre maintained at greens height this can be a very demanding task. You must also consider that these are research plots and ratings are taken on a regular basis. In fact this past year the TDDL conducted over 30 research studies.

## May

The first rush of samples to the lab usually occurs sometime in May, which means it's time to put two hats on, one for a diagnostician and another for researcher. Also, during the second week of the month the TDDL usually hosts the last snow mold field day at Gateway Golf Club in Land O' Lakes. The first summer disease studies are initiated sometime in May. Take-all patch treatments are applied once the soil temperatures reach 55°F, and the first applications for dollar spot are soon to follow. We are also busy growing in any new plots that we established earlier. Another important task in May is preparing research reports for the chemical companies who help support much of the research done in the Turfgrass Pathology Program.

## June

The diagnostic lab is now in full swing, diagnosing samples on a regular basis. We can easily have several samples a day, on top of the research responsibilities in the field. Now that the warmer weather has arrived, it is time to initiate several other summer disease

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studies. In the past couple of years, brown patch has been active by the end of June. Anthracnose studies are also initiated at this time. By the end of June, every summer disease trial has begun, with the exception of *pythium* blight. Because all of my student workers are turf students, I like to help broaden their experience by involving them in projects at the Noer. For example, this may include assisting other researchers in installing or repairing irrigation. Because many of these students may be lacking knowledge in these areas, some supervision may be required.

### July

This is another extremely busy time, just like rating snow mold plots and snow mold field days in the spring, establishment of snow mold plots in the fall, and preparing for the WTA Expo. July is busy because we usually have around 15 studies running concurrently. The most time consuming of these studies is *pythium*. Even though the study runs 14 days, the greenhouses need to be covered the week before, and

during the trial, the greenhouses are "baby-sat" from sun up to sun down. In the lab we can easily process 100 samples during this month. We have even seen 10 or more samples in a day during July. At the end of the month research reports must be written for the field day booklet, as it is only a couple of weeks away. That also means that it is time to put the finishing touches on the Noer Facility.

### August

Field day, need I say more? I think the best analogy for field day is either a member-guest event or the men's invitational at your course, and you know what is required in preparation for those events. We realize that you are scrutinized everyday of the season by your golfers. So it is only fair that you have one day a year where you can critique others. Field day takes several weeks to get everything prepared. Last year we had around 500 signs to make and 13 plots to paint. I am also a believer in paying attention to details, so my staff maintained the intermediate cut around all of the fairway height and greens height



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plots throughout the season, along with irrigating the alleys on a regular basis. I feel that these extra projects are important because it better prepares my student workers for golf course work. This is one way I can help show them what is required to make a membership or clientele happy. Following field day, we finally have a little breathing room until September.

### September

It is once again time to prepare reports for technical representatives from the chemical companies. This report will cover all of the summer studies that I have done in the past season, and is usually around 30 pages in length. I am also dealing with many of them on a regular basis to line up treatments for snow mold work. At the end of the month, I start my final travel period and crunch time of the year. During late September, until early November, I am on the road every week working on snow mold plots. Many of the plots require ratings before winter as well as in the spring. I also have some teaching requirements in the fall, where I assist in teaching Plant Pathology 300 (Introductory Plant Pathology). In the past year, a turfgrass pathology discussion group has been added which meets weekly.

### October

Snow mold, snow mold, and more snow mold! As you know we have developed probably the premier snow mold research program in the country (perhaps the world). From a financial standpoint we receive over half of our research funding from snow mold research, and the individuals supporting this work have come to recognize that we are "tops" in providing data in this area. As noted earlier in the article we have 17 snow mold research plots out this year which will probably remain fairly constant. As I have illustrated, this disease also requires that we take the show on the road because of the differing pathogen populations across the state.

### November

After finishing up the snow mold work early in the month, it is time for a week or two of catching up. Toward the end of the month, we start sending out contract renewals. But in general, November is a time for tying up loose ends and to start thinking about the future.

### December

We made it! The last month of the year is a time of reflection. This is when we look back on the previous year and determine what changes need to be made. For example, this past year we reviewed the financial support for the lab and felt that we needed to develop a deeper contract base to ensure the lab's existence well into the future. We also saw the need for clerical support, so we hired Audra Anderson at 10% time to assist with the contracts, invoicing, and diagnosis write-ups. Finally, the end of the month rolls around and it is time to start thinking about Expo again.

As you can see being a diagnostician for the TDDL requires more than being able to diagnose samples. I would say that maybe about 30% of my time is spent on diagnosis. A majority of my time is probably spent in research. But, the unspoken majority is for fund raising, either through grant preparation or increasing and processing contracts. Being a diagnostician is a very fulfilling job, but it is a very time consuming job as well. So anytime that you have an open day to spend working with me Oscar, feel free to give me a call. This offer extends to everyone reading this. The lab is here for you, the turfgrass manager, and if you would like to learn more about it, feel free to give me a call. I would be willing to set up time for you to visit the lab and the Noer Facility to see what we are all about. ♣



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