

*An In-Depth Look At The Science Of  
Plant Pathology And At America's  
Highest Ranked Plant Pathology  
Department - The University of  
Wisconsin-Madison!*



# THE GRASS ROOTS

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Wisconsin is the home for many European immigrants. These settlers from the Old World brought with them not only their customs, but also their most precious possessions which included seeds and plants. Unwanted, unknown hitchhiking plant pathogens and weed seeds accompanied these plant introductions. One such crop, cabbage, was to play a major role in the formation of the Department of Plant Pathology.

The first record of cabbage grown in Wisconsin is a letter dated Sept. 12, 1840 and sent by Mr. Nicholas Le Provost, an immigrant from the Isle of Guernsey, to his aunt in France. Mr. Le Provost had purchased an eighty acre farm in Racine County. Growers in the area found a ready market for cabbage in the developing city of Chicago. Cabbage was harvested in the morning, packed in barrels, driven to the boat docks in Racine by horse and wagon, and delivered to Chicago by boat the next morning. With the continuation of excellent markets for fresh cabbage and kraut, growers planted cabbage year after year; but this eventually led to "cabbage sick" soil. By 1890, crop failures were more common, than successes. The growers from Racine and Kenosha county called a meeting and invited Professor H. L. Russell from the College of Agriculture. Dr. Russell had been trained in the area of microbiology and had studied with many of Europe's great microbiologists, e.g. Pasteur and Koch. These scientists had finally provided firm evidence of the germ theory of disease. The meeting with the cabbage growers led to Russell's in-

## DEPARTMENT OF PLANT PATHOLOGY: 76 YEARS OF ACHIEVEMENTS UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN- MADISON

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terest in diseases and his eventual discovery of a bacterial pathogen of cabbage. This experience with cabbage diseases must have impressed on him the importance of having a Department of Plant Pathology in the College. For when Professor Russell became Dean of the College of Agriculture in 1907, one of his first actions was to recommend the establishment of such a department as well as Entomology.

Dean Russell searched for an appropriate plant pathologist and found one in Professor L. R. Jones of the Botany Department at the University of Vermont. Since Dr. Jones was raised near Brandon, Wisconsin and had attended Ripon College, it was not difficult for him to return to his home State. Jones' early work led to the release of disease resistant cabbage varieties.

Thus, the Department was born from the needs of growers; and this important relationship between faculty and grower needs

has been a strength of our College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Growers have recognized the value of supporting research at the University; and currently, our Department receives support from many grower groups, e.g. arborists, turf industry, muck growers, potato, mint, ginseng, cabbage, cherry, cranberry and soybean organizations.

Professor Jones' capable leadership resulted in the Department's expansion to seven faculty members by 1923. These plant pathologists were primarily trained under his watchful eye: G. W. Keitt, R. E. Vaughan, J. C. Walker, A. J. Riker, J. G. Dickson, J. Johnson (Horticulture Department), and J. W. Brann. It is of interest, that in 1912, J. C. Walker, a lad from Racine county, decided to major in plant pathology as an under-

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