

Dr. George N. Agrios 1936-2010

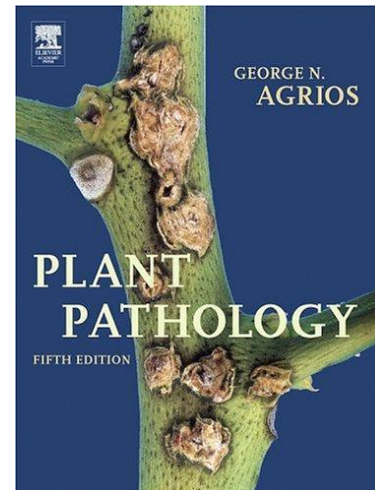


Dr. George N. Agrios, first director of the University of Florida-IFAS Plant Medicine Program, was born in Galarinos, Halkidiki, Greece, and received his Ph.D. degree from Iowa State University in 1960 with the support of a Fulbright Grant. After serving for 2 years in the Engineering Corps of the Greek Army as a demolition expert, he moved to the United States, where he assumed a faculty position at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. His main duties there involved teaching several courses in plant pathology and conducting research on viruses of pepper, squash, corn, and pome fruits. In 1980, he proposed and spearheaded the creation of a biotechnology program at the University

of Massachusetts and received a state wide "Award of Excellence" for his services. In 1988, he became Chair of the UF-IFAS Department of Plant Pathology where he served until 2002.

Dr. Agrios was elected Fellow of the American Phytopathological Society in 1983 and assumed the highest administrative office of the Society as President (1990-91). He presented a memorable presidential address at the APS Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon in 1990 indicating his plans to establish the Plant Medicine Program at the University of Florida. Dr. Agrios also served as President of the Northeast Division of the APS and Chairman of the Technical Committee on Viruses and Virus-Like Diseases of Deciduous Fruit Trees and Vines.

Although Dr. Agrios had an illustrious career as a researcher, classroom teacher, and administrator, none of his many achievements has had a greater global impact on the discipline of plant pathology than his text, *Plant Pathology*, which was first published in 1969 and, in 2005, appeared in its fifth edition. It is, without question, the most widely used plant pathology text in the world and has been for more than 30 years. The original English version has been translated into 11 languages thus making this encyclopedic work readily available in the native tongues of 75 per cent of the world's population. It is impossible to know just how many plant scientists have used this book, but it is probably safe to say that most plant pathologists alive today gained their first formal classroom exposure to plant pathology, directly or indirectly, from it.



Dr. Agrios has made other important contributions to spreading the word about plant pathology. As Editor-in-Chief of the APS Editorial Board, he conceived, organized, and implemented the APS Press, which continuously publishes and sells an extensive body of plant pathological literature. Today, as a direct result of his efforts, millions of dollars worth of books, periodicals, and various visual aids and computer software are now being published and made available to students, growers, plant pathologists and other agricultural support personnel annually throughout the world. In addition, shortly after coming to Florida, Dr. Agrios founded the Florida

Phytopathological Society, which brings together over 100 plant pathologists working for UF-IFAS in Gainesville and its Research and Education Centers, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the USDA, and various industry groups.

Recognizing the eclectic nature of plant pathology, Dr. Agrios was also instrumental in establishing two, now extremely popular, lower division courses at the University of Florida in plant pathology. These courses (“Molds, Mushrooms, Mildews, and Men” taught by Dr. J. W. Kimbrough and “Plants, Plagues, and People” taught by Dr. F. William Zettler) have increased in enrollment each semester and now together reach over 1,000 students annually. No other department of plant pathology in the U.S. has such high enrollments in college courses at that level.

The most innovative of all of Dr. Agrios’ accomplishments at UF, however, was his creation of the University of Florida’s multidisciplinary Plant Medicine Program of which he served as first director from 1999-2002. The Doctor of Plant Medicine (DPM) degree was approved after a 9-year effort as a professional doctoral degree by the Florida Board of Regents in 1999. Unlike conventional Ph.D. programs, DPM students are not required to conduct research on a specific topic within a single agricultural science discipline, such as entomology, plant pathology, weed science, etc. Instead, DPM students receive extensive multidisciplinary instruction through 120 credit hours (90 of courses and 30 of internships) covering all aspects of the prevention, diagnosis and management of plant health problems. In retrospect, the concept of a “general practitioner” for crops/plants similar to those in animal (DVM) and human medicine (MD) seems only logical. But it was Dr. Agrios, with help Drs. John L. Capinera (Chair, UF Department of Entomology/Nematology) and Jerry M. Bennett (Chair, UF Department of Agronomy), who fought for its first approval and implementation at UF. The UF Plant Medicine Program has graduated 50 DPMs who are positively impacting agriculture as crop consultants, extension specialists, regulators, teachers and other in other sectors of agriculture in the U.S. and worldwide. The UF Plant Medicine Program now directed by Dr. Bob McGovern has served as the model for Plant Medicine programs and departments in the Egypt, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the U.S.

