



This work was commissioned by Scotland's Centre of Expertise for Plant Health Funded by Scottish Government through the Rural & Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) Division under grant agreement No [PHC2020/07](#)

**Authors:** Ashleigh Holmes<sup>1</sup> and Kenneth Loades<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>James Hutton Institute, Errol Road, Invergowrie, Dundee, DD2 5DA

**Please cite this report as follows:** A. Holmes & K. Loades (2022). Enhancing the Plant Health Centre's Communication with Stakeholders. Project Summary. PHC2020/07. Scotland's Centre of Expertise for Plant Health (PHC). DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.7937980](#)

**Dissemination status:** Unrestricted

**Copyright:** All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, modified or stored in a retrieval system without the prior written permission of PHC management. While every effort is made to ensure that the information given here is accurate, no legal responsibility is accepted for any errors, omissions or misleading statements. All statements, views and opinions expressed in this paper are attributable to the author(s) who contribute to the activities of the PHC and do not necessarily represent those of the host institutions or funders.

# 1 Project Summary

## 1.1 Background

Plant health knowledge generated by the Plant Health Centre (PHC; ‘the Centre’) aims to be impactful across the four plant sectors: forestry, horticulture, environment, and agriculture. The plant health messages communicated by the Centre range from general underpinning messages relevant to all plant sectors to time sensitive and specific messages for a particular threat. The PHC Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (PHC2020/02) outlined plant health knowledge flows, stakeholder categories and communication goals and was discussed during a workshop on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021. This project was undertaken from May 2021 to May 2022 to facilitate implementation of the strategy.

## 1.2 Project Aims

- To liaise closely with the PHC Directorate and Sector leads to introduce, implement and support strategies and tools for plant health knowledge communication from the Centre to stakeholders.
- Support the dissemination of key plant health messages across the four sectors of horticulture, natural environment, forestry and agriculture.
- Foster a clear social media narrative for the Centre.
- Raise the profile of the PHC and help to develop its on-line resources.
- Explore different media for targeted dissemination of PHC outputs.
- Keep plant health and biosecurity at the forefront of stakeholders’ minds, and a high priority for them.

## 1.3 Key observations and challenges

- An important stakeholder for PHC is the Scottish Government and Chief Plant Health Officer for Scotland with PHC project areas primarily being led by policy demand, in consultation with other stakeholders who are engaged by Sector leads or members of the Strategic Advisory and Response Team (SART).
- PHC activities are well communicated via the email bulletin/newsletter and through social media and established professional networks through each of the Sector leads.
- The PHC website is a key communication tool and one which, although functional, required refreshing and updating as some elements (such as the search function) required improvement. Review of the website also highlighted that messaging could be improved using a concise strapline (*Strengthening plant health in Scotland*) and more prominence of ‘*The Key Principles*’, which were only previously accessible on the website in PDF form. It was also important to ensure that the website was compliant with Scottish Governments accessibility guidance.
- Within the PHC team at the time of this report, there were issues with capacity, limiting its ability to expand communication activities. A need was identified to increase support to adopt new strategies and approaches.
- PHC maintains a list of stakeholder contacts for direct communications and resource to keep this updated is recommended. This is to say that there is value in such an approach, but it was recognised that it would be a more efficient use of time to focus on other areas to increase impact.
- Although the PHC engages widely with many stakeholders, there is a need to engage using a wide range of approaches and to continue to try and engage with hard-to-reach stakeholders where PHC outputs would be of benefit.
- An early observation was the need for coherent messaging and improved communication of current PHC activities, funding opportunities and key outputs. Each presentation given by Sector leads, Directorate or SART should convey the same high-

level messaging on the goal of the PHC, its function and both current and recently completed activities. Introductory slides (in a new standard format) would also help to communicate the Key Principles and other core PHC activities and outputs.

- Engagement activities also include high profile in-person events, such as Potatoes in Practice, Arable Scotland and Scotland's Plant Health annual conference which have been important in building a community of stakeholders.
- Impact from PHC knowledge and wider engagement with stakeholders could be improved through more regular and planned delivery of messages on social media platforms.

#### *1.4 Project Activity*

- To increase efficiency, a Gantt chart system was developed with the capability of assigning specific Sector lead tasks and responsibilities. Through completion of the chart and mapping of activities over the year, a more strategic, efficient approach can be taken. Efficiency relates to the ability to deliver similar work to multiple audiences, ensuring a coherent and cohesive communication of key messages. This is critical in addressing new and emerging issues, which have potential to cause confusion or alarm if clear messaging is not undertaken.
- The website was overhauled with improvement to the structure, uniformity in layout, and improved user experience and navigability. The strapline 'Strengthening plant health in Scotland' was introduced to the website navigation menu. The Key Principles were refreshed with new logos to improve communication of key messages. Recommendations were also made on the frequency of website checking to ensure functionality and to address issues that may arise over time.
- Twitter strategies were discussed with the PHC Directorate, and a template created to schedule tweets and upload these to Twitter to be released automatically on prescribed dates or at prescribed intervals. The tweet template had key information to be included (tags, links to further information and images to engage users), with an initial template developed by the project team aligned to PHC activities, projects and events. Through adoption of this approach, compared to the previous year, the number of tweets increased 5-fold, profile visits increased ~ 7-fold, there was a 27% increase in new followers, and an 8-fold increase in mentions/engagement. However, this may also have been due in part to other factors such as the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The need to engage new stakeholders and broaden the audience is clear, with the project team highlighting potential approaches to do this and developing examples of outputs. Despite acknowledgement of the benefits that novel approaches and additional engagement tools would bring (such as more face to face meetings, podcasts, videos, online teaching/educational material), the issue of capacity to do this within the PHC was raised.

#### *1.5 Outcomes and Recommendations*

- Strategies were developed to manage PHC time and resource more efficiently regarding communication of outputs, general information on activities, aims and current issues related to plant health. Strategies and tools highlighted over the project duration should be adopted as standard practice by the PHC to ensure continued growth of social media channels.
- During the project there was a marked increase in metrics related to engagement with stakeholders through Twitter. A consistent social media presence can be maintained by the Centre through continued use of the tweet template and tweet scheduling.
- A website refresh was completed. However, to improve accessibility standards, future online publications (those currently in pdf format) should adopt an HTML file format. Existing pdfs should include html versions which can be added alongside those currently available.

- The website now conforms to current accessibility criteria. However, for future outputs (such as those in multi-media format) accessibility should be considered and alternative formats included. An example of this would be the need to include transcripts alongside any audio released (such as podcasts or narrated videos) to ensure accessibility to those hard of hearing.
- Development of a slide set (both template redesign and inclusion of the ‘Key Principles’) for all members of the PHC to adopt when delivering talks to key stakeholders will allow delivery of a clear, coherent, message. It is key that this slide set is kept updated, with the latest information on projects and outputs, and regularly distributed to PHC staff.
- The PHC should decide which engagement platforms they wish to focus outputs on, or through.
- The PHC should seek funding to support new initiatives to improve communication. The SEFARI IKE is one such opportunity. However, there may also be merit in applying collaboratively for Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) funding for engaging with audiences on specific topics/issues which are known to be of concern or that are becoming increasingly important. Such SAG examples might include addressing the challenges of NetZero with increasing constraints on strategies to maintain plant health. Working collaboratively with other key KE programmes such as the Farm Advisory Service, RHS and Forestry Commission could also add value. The PHC is only one of Scotland’s Centres of Expertise alongside, CREW, EPIC, CKEI and ClimateXChange. Opportunities to work alongside other centres and join forces for larger events to improve and increase impact should continue to be explored.

Plant Health Centre  
c/o The James Hutton Institute  
Invergowrie,  
Dundee, DD2 5DA

Tel: +44 (0)1382 568905

Email: [Info@PlantHealthCentre.scot](mailto:Info@PlantHealthCentre.scot)  
Website: [www.planthealthcentre.scot](http://www.planthealthcentre.scot)  
Twitter: [@PlantHealthScot](https://twitter.com/PlantHealthScot)



Royal  
Botanic Garden  
Edinburgh



UK Centre for  
Ecology & Hydrology



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot