PHC Bulletin Newsletter

Updating you on recent activities of the Plant Health Centre

Issue 18, November 2025

In this Bulletin

PHC News

Funded projects

Publications

Events

PHC News

Welcome to Issue 18

Since our last issue we have welcomed Scotland's new Chief Plant Health Officer and Head of SASA **David Kenyon.** David welcomed our conference delegates at Scotland's Plant Health Conference 2025 in early October.

The conference was a great opportunity to share the recent research outputs of the PHC through a series of quickfire talks. Two of these talks are highlighted below in publications, focused on modelling potato viruses and the risks of bulk aggregates.

A workshop co-organised with Scottish Government provided an opportunity for delegates to feed into the UK Pesticides National Action Plan and explore ways in which PHC projects can complement the Plan.

Along with the poster sessions there were several interactive opportunities for delegates including a mock up of the gold medal winning display from Chelsea Flower Show on the threats of Colorado beetle to food security, especially to potato crops.

As always, keep up to speed with Plant Health Centre news by following our page on Linkedin

-Katherine O'Donnell Plant Health Centre Communication Officer

Funded projects

In June we put out an open call for researchers keen to contribute to Scotland's preparation for future plant health risks facing any of our sectors. The Plant Health Centre funded 3 projects from this call.

- Rot Stop: Preserving the Beauty and Business of Scottish Bulbs
- Evidenced-based impacts of severe weather events on forestry pests in Scotland: a meta-analysis
- Endophyte plant protection product regulation jurisdiction: building consensus*

Call for action - The endophyte project involves the participation of stakeholders with expertise in areas like plant varietal rights, plant protection products, biological control regulation or release of organisms to the environment [no prior knowledge of endophytes required]. If you are interested in participating and helping support this project (or would like further information on what participation involves), you can get in touch with the project lead, Damian Bienkowski at damian.bienkowski@hutton.ac.uk.

These projects are currently underway and will be completed in early 2026

Publications

Since our last newsletter, we have published reports from two commissioned projects

Accurate potato virus forecasts: developing new models to guide sustainable management of potato crops in Scotland

This study evaluated existing virus forecasting models in Scotland and explored the potential of machine learning to improve prediction accuracy. Drawing on data from the Scottish Seed Potato Classification Scheme and stakeholder input, the team evaluated current models, identified grower needs, built improved national and local forecasts, and pinpointed key risk drivers. Linear models currently employed in Scotland were robust but the newly developed machine learning models can capture more complex relationships. The new national model achieved perfect classification of high versus low virus levels, and the local models delivered over 80 % accuracy.

Project recommendations

- Implement the machine learning models to replace existing forecasting approaches.
- Retrain and update models annually using the latest data.
- Utilise forecasts to inform industry guidance and strengthen virus management strategies, ensuring Scotland retains its reputation as a producer of high health seed.

Read the Report

Scoping the risk of bulk aggregate (topsoil, sand, gravel, stone, wood chips) movement into and within Scotland

The risks to plant health posed by moving bulk aggregates—topsoil, sand, gravel, stone, and wood chips—into and within Scotland are unknown, particularly since many of these materials are not currently treated as explicit pathways in the UK Plant Health Risk Register. Sectors such as building, quarrying, forestry and landscaping showed limited awareness of biosecurity related to such materials. Laboratory and literature evidence pointed to wood chips (often imported and untreated) and topsoil (with unknown origin and lacking treatment standards) as the highest risk materials; stone and gravel sourced locally were lower risk though occasional live pathogens were found.

Recommendations

- Quarrying and bulk aggregate industries should be made aware of biosecurity and plant disease spread as a major concern.
- An industry standard for wood chip and other bark products is urgently needed to ensure that this commodity is treated in some way to remove pests.
- British Standard for topsoil (BS 3882:2015) should be updated to include treatments which lower the risk of the product containing pests and pathogens.

Read the Report

All PHC publications can be viewed on our website and also on the Zenodo Scottish Plant Health Community

Events

Royal Highland Show - Animation Launch

In June we launched our joint animation with EPIC explaining the risks of bringing animal and plant products into Great Britain. Speakers from the PHC and EPIC highlighted the risks and the work of the Centres in protecting animal and plant health. Jim Fairlie, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity of Scotland commended the animation and is leading discussions with the ports and airports to show the animation in terminals.

Watch the animation

Remember, 'think before you pack and don't bring it back'!.

The Economic Potential of Hemp in a Changing Scottish Climate

One of our sister Centre's of Expertise, ClimateXChange, is putting together an event with Scottish Government on hemp. They are bringing together existing and potential hemp farmers, researchers, investors and industry representatives to share knowledge and explore opportunities.

The day will include presentations from researchers investigating hemp's potential as a protein, fibre and construction crop, experts investigating growing hemp in the Scottish climate as well as those at the forefront of developing supply chains and farming cooperatives.

If you are interested in attending get a free ticket here

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

The Plant Health Centre is a virtual centre of expertise funded by Scottish Government through RESAS (Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division) to help tackle plant health challenges for Scotland