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PHC Bulletin Newsletter

Plant Health Centre
Scotland's Centre of Expertise

Updating you on recent activities of the Plant Health Centre

Issue 20, Nov 2026

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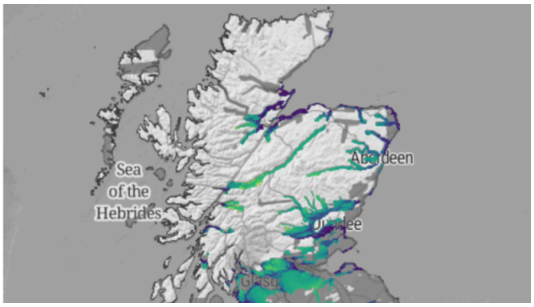

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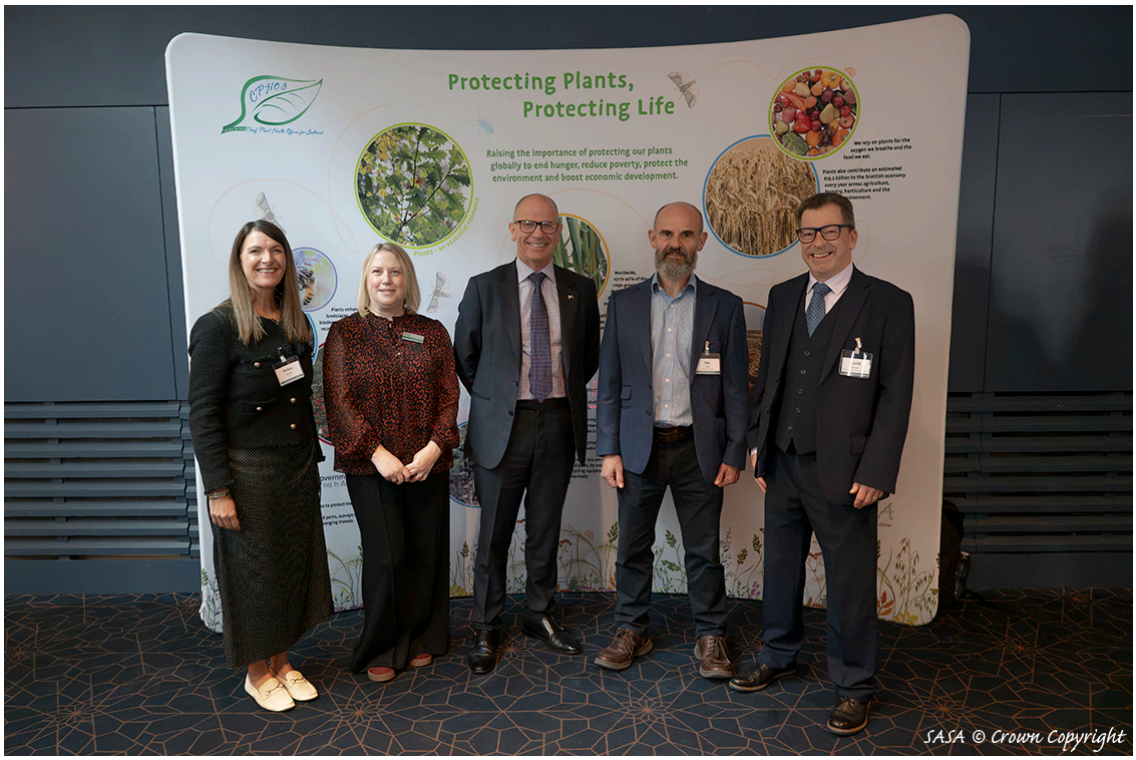


Welcome to Issue 20

It was fantastic to see so many of you at Scotland's Plant Health Conference this year. The conference was opened by **Jim Fairlie MSP** for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands. We had a great line-up of speakers discussing all things plant health ranging from potatoes to biosecurity to Martians! In this issue we sum up your feedback from the conference and bring you other event news.

We also bring you our recently published project reports and our latest blog on Protecting Scotland's Wild Areas from Plant Pests and Diseases.

National Tree Week takes place from the 21st November to 29th November. Take some time during the week to plant, protect and celebrate trees!

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

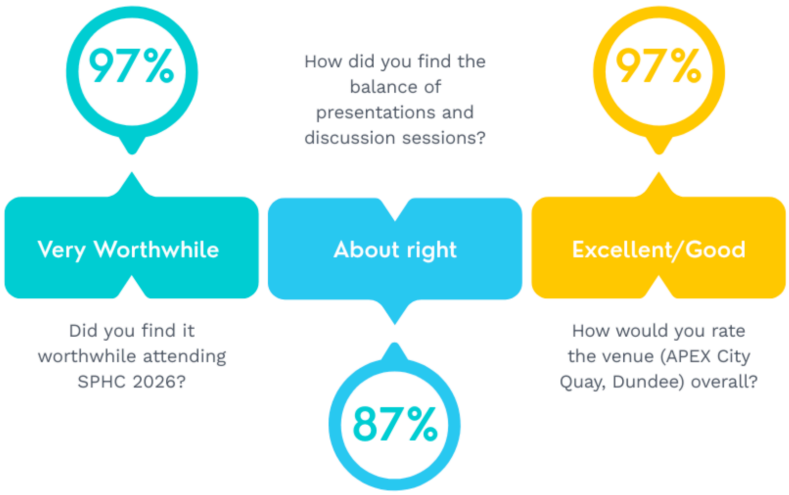
-Katherine O'Donnell Plant Health Centre Communication Officer

Events



Scotland's Plant Health Conference 2026

Thanks to everyone who contributed feedback on this year's conference. We are happy to hear from our feedback survey that 97% of the delegates attending SPHC 2026 found it very worthwhile. 87% found that there was the right balance between presentations and discussion sessions, and 97% found the venue either excellent or good. We also gathered some useful ideas for topics to cover at next year's conference, including emerging pests and diseases, plant passports, the impacts of the SPS Agreement and global threats.



We and the other conference organisers (Scottish Government, HTA, NatureScot and Scottish Forestry) take every piece of feedback shared with us on board to bring you a better conference next year.

Potato Cyst Nematode Action Scotland

Potato Cyst Nematode Action Scotland is a 5 year multi-stranded research and knowledge exchange programme that evolved from an initial PHC funded working group and options appraisal report. To celebrate the PCN Action Scotland project coming to an end in 2026 Dr James Price and Dr Kerry Leslie gave a short interview summarising the project and the PCN Scenario Planner (a *free to use, web-based tool* designed to help professional potato growers and agronomists assess PCN risk) to the Farming Today team at BBC Radio 4.

To Listen click here: https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002sr5y

UK Plant Health Conference at FERA

During the summer, members of the Plant Health Centre team attended a two-day event which brought together representatives from across the UK and Ireland's plant health community. The conference was a useful opportunity to find out who's who in plant health with the PHC providing a presentation on the centre and our activities to the delegates.

It was also an opportunity to see the results of some work that the PHC has been involved with on a Zine for schools. The Zine, entitled '**Plant Health Defenders**' is an educational resource introducing plant health, biosecurity, surveillance, pests, pathogens and careers in plant science.



Publications



Since our last newsletter we have published 4 reports showcasing industry led research, guidance, novel technologies and a decision support tool.

RotStop: Preserving the beauty and business of Scottish bulbs

Responding directly to industry demand for practical, evidence-based options to deal with Basal rot on daffodils (caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. narcissi* (FON)) this project reviewed biological and disinfecting treatments that have shown activity against *Fusarium* in bulb crops.

Project recommendations

- Priority treatments need to be effective, regulatory realistic, work within bulb handling systems, minimise operator exposure risk and disposal burden
- Hot water treatment (HWT) is the cornerstone of bulb sanitation and any new interventions must integrate with this system
- A prioritised list of candidate treatments was generated, identifying microbial biocontrol agents and oxidising sanitation agents as the most promising options for practical application

Read the Report

Follow on work - The RotStop project has generated follow-on impact through continued collaboration between the James Hutton Institute and Grampian Growers who will be testing different treatment options next season

Developing new models to predict PCN species presence / absence in Scottish soils

An interactive Potato Cyst Nematode mapping and prediction app (PCN-Mapper) was created for internal SASA use that brings together PCN testing data, spatial analysis, and machine learning. The app visualises the distribution and relative intensity of *G. pallida* and *G. rostochiensis* across Scotland, highlighting where infestations are most concentrated and where current risk is greatest.

Project recommendations

- PCN-Mapper provides a valuable resource that could be used by SASA to support plant health monitoring and inform future policy development
- PCN-Mapper could also be used by SASA as a communication tool at grower and stakeholder helping to illustrate regional and species-specific risk pattern

Read the Report

Whole of Scotland LiDAR: Analysing the opportunities for plant health benefits and potential barriers to exploitation

This project investigated, to what extent Scotland's national airborne LiDAR programme can support plant health surveillance under its current technical specification, and how it should be positioned within a structural, multi-sensor monitoring framework.

Project recommendations

- Integrate LiDAR into a multi-sensor monitoring framework
- Develop a strategic approach to LiDAR data use

Read the Report

Understanding the risk to Scotland's plant health arising from wireworm (click beetles) and the monitoring and Integrated Pest Management requirements

As an established and potentially increasing pest threat to Scottish agriculture wireworm distribution in Scotland was assessed, including species composition and grower awareness. 75% of surveyed sites contained wireworm or related click beetle species.

Project recommendations

- Promote use of the guidance on trapping and IPM created by the project
- Click beetle pheromone trapping is an effective method for detecting and tracking click-beetle and therefore wireworm populations
- Growers and agronomists should utilise the results of this project to support earlier detection and long-term control of wireworm

Read the Report

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

Blog



Introducing a new resource - the Plant Health Biosecurity Plan to protect Scotland's wild areas from plant pests and diseases

The increased occurrence of impactful pests and diseases on Scotland's native plant species has been of mounting concern in recent years. Whilst tree heath issues are high profile, and symptoms are usually noticed quickly, plant health issues on non-tree species in the wider

environment often receive less attention. For example, heathland species such as blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) are susceptible to numerous introduced *Phytophthora* pathogens.

Recent PHC research has involved the creation of a biosecurity plan. The biosecurity plan is available for the first time to groups carrying out conservation work in non-woodland natural environments. This plan helps support conservation efforts to achieve positive outcomes without doing unintended harm.

Read the Blog 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

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