

Voices from the Field: Feedback on University Plant Diagnostic Clinic and Soil Testing Program

RELEVANCE

The University of Delaware's **Plant Diagnostic Clinic** and **Soil Testing Program** provides essential **diagnostic services** to homeowners, gardeners, and agricultural professionals.

University of Delaware wanted to ensure the programs are meeting the evolving **clientele needs**.

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses..
- Identify potential new or expanded services.
- Develop evidence-based recommendations.
- Establish a framework for ongoing evaluation.

An **assessment** was conducted of the diagnostic services.



RESPONSE

Interviews with six UD and one Delaware State University Extension professionals provided their honest **feedback** about the diagnostic services.

General public and Master Gardeners surveys



Community surveys at prominent events



- Delaware State Fair
- UD Carvel Center field day

A separate survey was deployed online to get **Master Gardener feedback**



RESULTS

Key preliminary findings from the community and Master Gardener surveys include:

Community



210 Responses in the following categories: home gardener (**140**), commercial agricultural professional (**54**), other (**16**)

67 People were aware of both programs, **61** were only aware of the soil testing program, 4 were only aware of the plant diagnostics lab, **78** were not aware of either service.

35 of **78** people who were not aware of UD diagnostic services wanted more information, meaning marketing could yield additional customers.

Most people were willing to wait 1-3 weeks for results



Master Gardener



66 of 80 respondents were aware of the types and scope of services available through the UD Plant Diagnostic Clinic and Soil Testing Program

76 of 78 have personally used or recommended these services

58 of 75 respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the soil testing turnaround time during peak season



RELEVANCE

The University of Delaware's Plant Diagnostic Clinic and Soil Testing Program provides essential diagnostic services to homeowners, gardeners, and agricultural professionals. An assessment was conducted of the diagnostic services offered by the University of Delaware to ensure programs meet evolving clientele needs. The objectives were to 1) identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and areas for improvement of these services, 2) identify potential new or expanded services that align with evolving community needs and expectations, 3) develop evidence-based recommendations for enhancing program accessibility, relevance, and overall impact, and 4) establish a framework for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of extension efforts to meet changing community requirements.

RESPONSE

Interviews with six UD and one Delaware State University Extension professionals provided their honest feedback about the diagnostic services available through the UD Plant Diagnostic Clinic and Soil Testing Program. The interviews with Extension professionals guided the development of general public and Master Gardeners surveys. Community surveys were deployed at prominent events, such as the Delaware State Fair and the UD Carvel Research and Education Center field day. A separate survey was deployed online to get Master Gardener feedback on UD diagnostic services.

RESULTS

Key preliminary findings from the community survey include:

- 210 responses in the following categories: home gardener (140), commercial agricultural professional (54), other (16)
- 67 people were aware of both programs, 61 were only aware of the soil testing program, 4 were only aware of the plant diagnostics lab, 78 were not aware of either service
- 35 of 78 people who were not aware of UD diagnostic services wanted more information, meaning marketing could yield additional customers
- Most people were willing to wait 1-3 weeks for results

Key preliminary findings of the Master Gardener survey include:

- 66 of 80 respondents were aware of the types and scope of services available through the UD Plant Diagnostic Clinic and Soil Testing Program
- 76 of 78 have personally used or recommended these services
- 58 of 75 respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the soil testing turnaround time during peak season

PUBLIC VALUE STATEMENT

The survey findings highlight the importance of improving program visibility, accessibility, and relevance. The UD diagnostic services help improve agricultural and horticultural practices, environmental sustainability, and food security in Delaware. By diagnosing soil fertility and plant issues, UD diagnostic services help clientele to reduce input use (fertilizers and pesticides), protect beneficial insects and pollinators, reduce the development of resistant insects and plant diseases, and identify new and emerging pathogens and pests.