

USU Plant Pest Diagnostic Lab Earns National Designation as a Core Accredited Lab

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Savannah Gleeson, lab assistant, doing a DNA extraction of moth samples for molecular identification by Claudia Nischwitz
Paige Bowler, lab assistant, preparing insects from sticky cards for molecular identification by Claudia Nischwitz
The National Plant Diagnostic Network (NPDN) recently announced that Claudia Nischwitz and Ernane Vieira-Neto of the [Utah State University Utah Plant Pest Diagnostic Lab](#) completed and implemented a quality management system for the UPPDL, earning recognition as a core accredited lab. The UPPDL is one of only 10 university plant diagnostic labs to date in the nation to receive the designation.

Nischwitz, a USU associate professor and Extension plant pathologist, said the core accreditation ensures that NPDN labs meet stringent quality standards, thus exhibiting a strong commitment to excellence in plant diagnostics.

“We can do a lot of testing, ranging from microscopy to molecular and antibody-based analyses in our lab, in part because of grants from NPDN that let us purchase needed equipment,” Nischwitz said. “However, if we cannot do a specific test, we can now send the sample to another accredited lab within NPDN, and they can provide the testing. The funds from the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, NPDN, and Extension have allowed us to keep costs for clients low, and with the accreditation, we can continue to keep them low.”

The NPDN is an internationally respected consortium of plant diagnostic laboratories. It was established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture – National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the Office of Homeland Security to enhance agricultural biosecurity by detecting instances of biological attacks. The NPDN works to protect plant health and productivity of U.S. agricultural and natural ecosystems by providing early detection and identification

of plant pests and diseases in all 50 states and four U.S. territories.

In 2024 alone, 225,829 diagnoses were entered into the National Data Repository by NPDN labs covering 78% of the counties in the U.S. Labs reported 193 first detections, which are organisms found for the first time in a state.

Justen Smith, USU Extension interim vice president, said under Nischwitz’s leadership, the UPPDL has shown a strong commitment to quality diagnostics, highlighting its position at the forefront of the field and, most of all, as an integral laboratory for Utah.

“This designation represents a significant milestone for both the university and the NPDN, underscoring the great work of Dr. Nischwitz and Dr. Vieira-Neto,” Smith said. “The UPPDL is an essential part of Extension’s mission in Utah, and we couldn’t be more proud of this prestigious designation.”

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