

U Of I Extension's "Distance Diagnostics"

URBANA, ILL. What's chewing on your garden plants or ailing your soybeans or ruining the apples on your backyard tree? Now there are 50 University of Illinois Extension professionals ready and able to answer those and other questions through the Distance Diagnostics System.

"Using digital imaging equipment, local Extension office staff can take high-quality images of plant and pest problems," explained Dennis Bowman, a U of I Extension crop systems educator who oversees the system. "The images, along with background information about the problem, are submitted to Distance Diagnostics (<http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/distancediagnostics/>). Ap-

propriate experts are instantly notified.

"No matter where they are, if these experts can get e-mail, they can make a diagnosis."

Bowman noted that rapid diagnosis is critical in preventing losses and providing peace of mind.

"Last year, 22 percent of the samples were diagnosed within two hours of submission, and 77 percent within 48 hours," he said.

Since the system was launched in 1999, nearly 8,000 plant and pest samples have been processed. The system connects 95 local U of I Extension field offices with more than 50 campus and field-based experts.

Bowman said internal studies indicate that the potential economic impact of Distance Diagnostics in 2008 alone was \$500,000. Δ



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