Beech Leaf Disease Update

Pierluigi (Enrico) Bonello

Department of Plant Pathology
The Ohio State University
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• Co-PIs:
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  • Jason Slot (OSU Dept. of Plant Pathology)
• An active collaboration with:
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• Other collaborators:
  • Soledad Benitez (OSU Dept. of Plant Pathology)
  • Cristina Rosa (Penn State Dept. of Plant Pathology)
  • Lynn Carta (USDA ARS, Beltsville, MD)
  • David Burke (The Holden Arboretum, Kirtland, OH)
Ongoing Work

Carrie Ewing, PhD Candidate
The Ohio State University
Environmental Science Graduate Program
Ongoing Work

Phenological studies of symptom progression
Ongoing Work
Banding symptoms

No new leaves

Crinkling

Banding symptoms
Photo from Dr. Rebecca Lidster, Forest Health Technical Specialist in Ontario
BLD in Ohio nurseries

American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)

European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)

European beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)

Photos from Dr. David McCann, Ohio Department of Agriculture Division of Plant Health
Mystery disease killing beech trees

By Mark Kinver
Environment reporter, BBC News

○ 19 February 2019

Once a tree displays the symptoms of Beech Leaf Disease, it will die in the coming years

A mysterious disease that is killing beech trees is spreading across parts of the United States.
What's causing it?
**EPPO Alert List** – Beech leaf disease and its potential causal agent (*Litylenchus crenatae*)

**Why**

A new disease of beech trees (*Fagus* spp.) called ‘Beech leaf disease’ (BLD) has increasingly been observed in forest areas in Eastern USA and Canada (EPPO RS 2018/178) and is raising serious concerns among foresters and local communities in affected areas. The disease was first reported on *Fagus grandifolia* in Ohio (Lake county) in 2012, and it rapidly spread to other counties in Ohio, as well as to Pennsylvania, New York, and Ontario (Canada). The disease has mainly been observed in forests but also in landscaped areas. The cause of this emerging disease remains to be elucidated, but a nematode species, *Litylenchus crenatae* n. sp., newly described from Japan on *Fagus crenata*, is now suspected to be at least one of the causal agents of BLD. Considering the threat that this new disease of uncertain etiology represents to beech trees, the NPPO of the United Kingdom has added it to the UK Plant Health Risk Register and also suggested to add it to the EPPO Alert List. This proposal was supported by the Panel on Phytosanitary Measures.
A mysterious disease is striking American beech trees

By Gabriel Popkin | Nov. 14, 2019, 3:00 PM

A mysterious disease is starting to kill American beeches, one of eastern North America's most important trees, and has spread rapidly from the Great Lakes to New England. But scientists disagree about what is causing the ailment, dubbed beech leaf disease. Some have recently blamed a tiny leaf-eating worm introduced from Asia, but others are skeptical that's the whole story.
Microbial profiling to discover the causal agent of BLD
What's causing it?

Molecular Leaf Microbial Community Profiling

**Compare**

- Naïve Leaves
- Asymptomatic Leaves
- Banded Leaves
- Crinkled Leaves

Total DNA and RNA

- Amplification of ITS (fungi), 16S (bacteria/phytoplasmas), 18S (nematodes)
- RNA enrichment (viruses)

High Throughput Sequencing (HTS)

- Quality control, filtering, QIIME II and Blastn classification/putative IDs

- Operational taxonomic units (OTUs)
Foliage Sampling

Sampled May & August of 2017, 2018 & 2019

- 8 permanent plots
  - 4 in northeast Ohio
  - 3 in northwest Pennsylvania
  - 1 in Pataskala, OH (control site)
- 100 trees tagged
  - 4-6 leaves/tree (based on sample type)
Key question: Are there correlations between virus-like RNA sequences, and other pathogen group-specific DNA sequences & symptom/exposure status?

N.B.: Phytoplasmas have already been excluded
So, what about the nematode?

• Whole tree disease expression patterns are consistent with nematodes: Starting in lower canopy where moisture is higher (favors foliar nematodes).

• The crinkling symptom is consistent with what is known about foliar nematodes: They destroy the mesophyll leading to tissue collapse, among other effects.
So, what about the microbes we found associated with symptoms?

- *Wolbachia* sp. – endosymbiont of the nematode? May not be responsible for BLD but could help the nematode survive.

- *Pseudomonas chlororaphis* – Has known anti-fungal properties and can cause necrosis in plants when inoculated at high levels. Could be an opportunist.

- Perhaps most interesting is *Erwinia persicina* – Could cause vascular wilt which slowly kills the trees, similarly to what *Erwinia amylovora* does in fire blight of apple/pear trees.
Could be a case of a microbial disease vectored by a nematode (vectored by?)

• Current consensus between us, Lynn Carta and David Burke is that the nematode is a necessary but non-sufficient condition for disease development

• Perhaps the nematode is itself vectored by mites
Nematodes and Mites
Could be a case of a microbial disease vectored by a nematode (vectored by?)

• Next step: metabarcade nematodes themselves. If association between *Pseudomonas chlororaphis*/*Erwinia persicina* and the nematode is confirmed, then:

• Need to conduct Koch’s postulates with nematode alone, microbe(s) alone, nematode + microbe(s)
THANK YOU!