Late blight update: We reported late blight in Wisconsin potato fields last week in Barron, Adams, and Portage Counties. There was an additional report out of Oneida County over the weekend. The genotype of the Barron and Adams County late blight samples was US-23 based on allozymes analysis. My lab will continue to work on further samples and we will report in this newsletter.

It is critical that potato fields are intensively scouted and are receiving protective fungicides on a 7-day schedule at this time. Fields that have received or are scheduled to soon receive vine kill treatments should continue to be protected with appropriate fungicides. Fields should not be harvested 2-3 weeks after vine kill.

Why apply fungicides to apparently dead plant foliage? Depending upon the health of the crop at application, some time may be needed for vines to die after desiccant application. Even when vines appear to be dead, the lower stems of potato plants may remain green and succulent and can provide host to the late blight pathogen. Sporulating lower stems can lead to a wash down of spores from lower plant to tubers in the hill, causing direct infection. Tubers are also at risk if aerial spores make their way to the vine-killed field and are ‘washed out’ in rain.

In order to help better understand the epidemic at hand, please submit samples to my lab or work through your county agent and request that they send to me for genotyping. All we need to know is the county of sample origin, we do not need to have specific field or grower information associated with the sample. Identification of genotype at the county level would be very helpful in improving our understanding of this epidemic and potential future risks. Lab address is: Amanda Gevens, 1630 Linden Dr, Room 689, Plant Pathology Dept., University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706. Please send infected leaves in a slightly inflated ziplock bag with no paper towel. Overnight shipping is best.

Further information on late blight and its management can be found in the Vegetable Crop Updates newsletters archived at the University of Wisconsin Vegetable Pathology Website. Also, fact sheets on late blight are available under the “Late Blight” tab at the website.