

PLANT AND SOIL NEMATODES FUND

In August 2025, the Australasian Plant Pathology Society (APPS) established the Plant and Soil Nematodes Fund. Financial support for the fund is being provided by two experienced nematologists (Dr Graham Stirling and Dr Marcelle Stirling), but gifts of money from APPS members, the general public, industry or other organisations are welcome. The funds will be dispensed through the Stirling Awards Program in Nematology, a program which will provide Fellowships, Travel grants and various Awards to students, early-career scientists and others who are interested in contributing to the scientific discipline of plant and soil nematology.

STIRLING AWARDS PROGRAM IN NEMATOLOGY

This program aims to enhance the nematological expertise of students, early-career scientists and other people with an interest in plant and soil nematodes. Fellowships, Travel grants and various Awards are available to citizens and permanent residents of Australia who are interested in reducing yield losses caused by plant-parasitic nematodes or modifying the soil biological community so that populations of these important pests are reduced. These awards are intended to encourage undergraduate students to undertake studies on nematodes, their natural enemies, and other components of the soil biological community; provide support for students undertaking postgraduate studies in nematology; broaden the skills of practicing plant pathologists during the early stages of their career so they improve their nematological expertise; and enhance the capacity of early career scientists to undertake research on nematode pests of importance to agriculture and horticulture. Another important role is to support the development of scientists, extension personnel and consultants based in rural areas so that the farming community has access to competent professionals with the skills required to diagnose nematode problems and provide appropriate management advice.

Types of awards

Fellowships will be awarded to current PhD students and early career researchers who are undertaking nematological research in areas such as integrated nematode management, innovative or sustainable methods of controlling nematode pests, nematode-suppressive soils, interactions between nematodes and the soil biological community, nematode ecology, and nematode taxonomy. These awards have a maximum value of \$10,000 and will supplement funds obtained from other sources (e.g. research grants and scholarships). The funds must be utilised in the calendar year or financial year in which they are allocated. Recipients will also have the option of applying for another Fellowship to obtain further financial support in the following calendar or financial year.

Sub-doctoral Student Awards to a maximum value of \$3,000 will be provided to undergraduates, and honours or master students undertaking a research project on plant-parasitic or free-living nematodes. These awards may also be given to undergraduate or postgraduate students so they can work during a semester break in a research group that is likely to stimulate their interest in nematodes or encourage them to study nematology. The funds may be used to cover expenses such as field travel, accommodation, research assistance, equipment, and consumables.

Research Awards to a maximum value of \$5,000 will enable early career scientists undertaking research on nematodes to work for short periods in a research group with expertise or facilities relevant to their field of interest. These awards cover expenses such as travel costs, accommodation, equipment and consumables.

Rural Awards. Two types are available and both have a maximum value of \$5,000.

- Funds to enable nematologists to work for a short time in a rural location or collaborate with a professional based in a region to gain experience of the nematodes which occur in specified agricultural situations (e.g. specific crops, soil types, or environments)
- Funds to enable plant pathologists, extension personnel or agricultural consultants located in rural areas to enhance or broaden their nematological skills by undertaking a study program at a reputable institution, collaborating in some way with a nematologist, attending a professional workshop, or doing specialised hands-on training at an appropriate location.

Travel grants to a maximum value of \$5,000 that enable nematologists in the early stages of their careers to attend interstate or overseas nematology conferences or workshops.

Application process

The Stirling Awards Program in Nematology provides awards every year, subject to the availability of funds. Individuals applying for an award must be financial members of the APPS and the Australasian Association of Nematologists (AAN) at the time the award is conferred. Applications from non-members will be accepted but if a non-member receives an award, membership fees will be deducted from the value of the award so that the awardee becomes a member of APPS and AAN for two years.

Applicants for Fellowships or Sub-doctoral Student Awards should complete the Application Form below and submit it by 31 October for an award in the following calendar year, or by 30 April for an award in the following financial year. Research Awards, Rural Awards and Travel grants are only provided on a calendar year basis and so the Application Form must be submitted by 31 October. Applications must be no longer than two pages, with the most important components being details of what the applicant plans to do and the budget.

Applications should be emailed to Dr Graham Stirling; chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Plant and Soil Nematodes Fund: graham.stirling@biolcrop.com.au. Applicants requiring further information on the awards program should also contact Dr Stirling. Recipients of the awards will be notified within a month of the closing date for applications.

Funding arrangements

For Fellowships, Sub-doctoral Student Awards, and Research Awards, 75% of the allocated funds will be transferred to the recipient within two months of the recipient being notified of the award. The final 25% will be transferred in the final month of the calendar year or financial year (whichever is relevant to the award), provided an appropriate report (see below) has been received by the Executive Committee of the Plant and Soil Nematodes Fund.

Recipients of Rural Awards and Travel grants will be reimbursed in the final month of the relevant calendar year, provided an appropriate report has been received by the Executive Committee of the Plant and Soil Nematodes Fund.

Selection criteria

When candidates for awards are being selected, the following criteria will be considered.

- Applicants must demonstrate a high level of academic achievement or show that they are contributing (or have the capacity to contribute) significantly to some aspect of nematology.
- Applicants must demonstrate that the award will result in useful outcomes or will significantly enhance their capacity to undertake nematological research, or transfer nematological knowledge to students, farmers and the general community.
- In allocating awards, preference will be given to applicants with applied interests who are working on issues of importance to agriculture, forestry or the environment; to applicants who are doing innovative work that may lead to the development of improved or more sustainable nematode management strategies; and to applicants aiming to improve soil health and enhance nematode-suppressive services by improving our understanding of interactions between plant-parasitic nematodes and the wider soil biological community.

Reporting requirements

Fellowships and Research Awards: Research methodology and outcomes must be presented in the form of a scientific paper that is published in a peer-reviewed journal or provided as a written report that is available to APPS members.

Sub-doctoral Student Awards: Successful applicants must present the outcomes of their research in a written report that is available to APPS members.

Rural Awards and Travel grants: Successful applicants must provide a written report that is available to APPS members which outlines what was done with the funds and the outcomes obtained.

Selection committee

Members of the Executive Committee of the Plant and Soil Nematodes Fund will determine who receives the awards and how much money is allocated to each recipient.

- Dr Graham Stirling (Plant and Soil Nematodes)
- Dr Marcelle Stirling (Plant and Soil Nematodes)
- Dr Kirsty Owen (University of Southern Queensland)
- Dr Helen Hayden (RMIT University)