



February 2026

The Spore Print (2/23/26): Department of Plant Pathology February 2026 Newsletter



Please enjoy these updates from our department for February 2026.

Anita representing the editorial team: Mary, Nosheen, Jessica, Francely, Taylor, Mason, Aalok, Sudeep, Monique, Jana, Cynthia, and Xianming.

If you have news you would like included in the *next newsletter*, please email anita.paneru@wsu.edu.

[Click here to access past newsletters!](#) You will also be able to download the PDF version there.

If you have any feedback, please fill out the [questionnaire](#) for the Spore Print.

Thank you to Ninh Khuu for providing many of the photos seen in the newsletter headings.

Updates



2026-2027 PPGSO officer elections are coming up!

Plant Pathology Graduate Student Organization (PPGSO) elections are coming up! If you are a student looking to give back to the department and get valuable leadership experience, please consider nominating yourself or someone else for an officer position. The PPGSO is critical for contributing to the department's sense of community and purpose through social events, community outreach, and department communications like the Spore Print.

Here are the current officers - a huge expression of gratitude for all their service this year!
Please reach out with any questions you have about role(s):

President / Mount Vernon Representative - Mary Steele - mary.steele@wsu.edu

Vice President - Nosheen Fatima - nosheen.fatima@wsu.edu

Secretary - Francely Flores - f.florespablo@wsu.edu

Treasurer / Puyallup Representative - Taylor Mcnees - taylor.mcnees@wsu.edu

Faculty Liaison - Jessica Schallon - jessica.schallon@wsu.edu

Communications Officer / Spore Print - Anita Paneru - anita.paneru@wsu.edu

GPSA Representative / Prosser Representative - Sudeep Poudel - sudeep.poudel@wsu.edu

We will open the nomination form soon, so keep an eye out for that email.

Dr. Lindsey du Toit was awarded the Christiaan Hendrik Persoon Medal

Dr. Lindsey du Toit, Department Chair, Alfred Christianson Distinguished Professor of Vegetable Seed Pathology, and Extension Plant Pathologist of the Department of Plant Pathology, WSU, was awarded the **Christiaan Hendrik Persoon Medal** at the 54th Biennial Congress of the Southern African Society for Plant Pathology (SASPP) in Umhlanga, South Africa, January 18-21, 2026. The Christiaan Hendrik Persoon Medal is the most prestigious award of the SASPP, presented to members unequivocally recognized as world leaders in Plant Pathology. It recognizes the highest levels of achievement in the field as judged by international standards. Notably, it has been awarded only seven times since its inception in 1979.



1 - Dr. Lindsey du Toit (right) receiving the Christiaan Hendrik Persoon Medal at the 54th Biennial Congress of the Southern African Society for Plant Pathology in Umhlanga, South Africa on January 21, 2026.

WSU plant pathology graduates lead crop-defending clean plant programs across North America



2 - Currently leading clean plant certification efforts across North America, graduates from WSU's Department of Plant Pathology help protect tree fruit, grapevines, berries, sweetpotatoes, and other important crops. From left are Cristian Olaya, Noma Chingandu, Christie Almeyda, Dan Villamor, and Segun Akinbade.

Six alumni from WSU's Department of Plant Pathology are leading or managing **clean-plant certification programs** across five U.S. states and Canada. These programs serve as the first line of defense against destructive plant diseases that threaten apples, berries, sweet potatoes, ornamentals, and other high-value crops.

The four doctoral graduates and two master's recipients: Christie Almeyda, Dan Villamor, Cristian Olaya, Dipak Poudyal, Segun Akinbade, and Noma Chingandu are at the forefront of international efforts to protect the food supply.

For more details, the article was published in WSU Insider and can be found [here](#). Thank you, Dr. Hanu Pappu, for sharing the update.

Welcome to plant pathology, Dr. Vinicius Garnica!

The WSU Plant Pathology community is excited to welcome **Dr. Vinicius (Vini) Garnica** as the newest faculty member in the Department of Plant Pathology at Washington State University. Dr. Garnica will join our department on June 16, 2026, as an **Assistant Professor of Potato Pathology**. He will be based in Pullman with his lab in Vogel Hall.

Welcome, Dr. Garnica, to the WSU Plant Pathology community!

Congratulations, Dr. U'Ren and Dr. Tanaka!

Congratulations to **Dr. Jana U'Ren** on earning tenure and promotion to Associate Professor, and to **Dr. Kiwamu Tanaka** on his promotion to Full Professor, effective July 1, 2026.

Thank you both for your exceptional mentorship and contributions to the plant pathology community.

PPGSO bioinformatic consultations available by appointment

To better organize the PLP Bioinformatic Consultation Table, we decided to cancel our meeting hours on Thursday. Instead, we are open by appointment (15min - 30min, via Zoom or in person). Please provide the time you want to meet and your bioinformatic questions to the consultants below.

Ko <itsuhiro.ko@wsu.edu> : Kamiak HPC, Transcriptome and Genome analysis, Sequencing, Python/Linux coding

Megan <megan.nickerson@wsu.edu> : R coding: Statistics and data visualization

Research Associate Spotlight: Dr. Meinan Wang



3 - Dr. Wang at Pullman nursery in 2022. Photo source: Dr. Meinan Wang.



4 - Dr. Wang at Pullman nursery in 2022. Photo source: Dr. Meinan Wang.



5 - Dr. Wang planting spring wheat at Mount Vernon Station in April 2023. Photo source: Dr. Meinan Wang.

Position/Title: Research Associate

Advisor/PI: Dr. Xianming Chen

Academic/Professional background: I received my B.S. degree in Plant Protection from Northwest A&F University (formerly Northwest Agricultural University) in China in 1992, followed by M.S. (1999) and Ph.D. (2002) in Plant Pathology from the same institution. From 1992 to 2005, I worked in the College of Plant Protection at Northwest A&F University, focusing on wheat disease management. In 2005, I joined Dr. Xianming Chen's laboratory at Washington State University to continue my research in plant pathology.

Hometown: I grew up in a small village just outside Xi'an in Shaanxi Province, China.

Hobbies: My hobbies include walking, reading, and gardening. I especially enjoy trying to grow new vegetables, herbs, and flowers, and learning which ones adapt well to this region.

Pets: I don't have pets. I really enjoy watching small animals, especially squirrels and cats.

What made you interested in plant pathology/microbiology?

I grew up in the countryside and spent much of my early life working with my parents in crop fields. I saw firsthand how plant diseases and pests could devastate crops, reducing both yield and quality, and I could feel the frustration and stress that farmers experienced. Those experiences motivated me to learn how to protect crops and support growers, which led me to major in Plant Protection at Northwest Agricultural University.

In my second year of college, a severe stripe rust epidemic hit the region. I went into the wheat fields with graduate students and my professor, and I still remember how thickly the yellow rust spores covered our clothes and shoes. It was unforgettable. I watched my professor talk with farmers about rust management, and that experience had a deep impact on me. That was the moment I knew I wanted to dedicate my career to stripe rust research and management

What is your favorite plant pathogen?

My favorite plant pathogen is stripe rust, *Puccinia striiformis* f. sp. *tritici* (Pst). Pst is not only one of the most important pathogens of wheat, but also a fascinating obligate biotroph with a complex life cycle that includes five spore stages - pycnia, aecia, uredinia, telia, and basidia. It requires two hosts to complete its full cycle: wheat or other grasses as the primary host, and *Berberis* or *Mahonia* as the alternate host. I have studied the biology of Pst, identified *Mahonia aquifolium* as a Pst alternate host, and evaluated the role of the alternate hosts in its life cycle under natural conditions in the Pacific Northwest. It is remarkable to see how the phenology of different hosts and local climate factors influences the survival, spread, and infection processes of the various spore stages in a specific geographic region.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

What I find most rewarding is seeing how my work directly strengthens our ability to manage rust diseases in wheat and barley. I annually monitor stripe rust virulence patterns across the U.S., characterize race diversity, and provide this information to guide management decisions. I also study resistance genetics and develop resistant germplasms that can be used by breeders. Being part of the process that leads to better disease control and helps advance durable resistance is deeply satisfying.

Statewide Updates



Pullman Updates

Join us for our **weekly departmental coffee hour**, held every Monday from 3:00 - 4:00 pm in Clark 299, right before the seminar.

A big thank-you to all the students who helped host this event!

Do you want to **host a PLP Coffee Hour** this semester? We're looking for **volunteers**. Sign up here:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1LafyV7ccu9pEbPtqG_iNG643oV2luPX0AULgeJEu34s/edit?usp=sharing



6 - PLP coffee hour flyer. Photo: Francely Flores

Jessica Schallon, Ph.D. student in Dr. Weidong Chen's lab, received a \$1,200 travel grant from the 2026 Pulse Crops Working Group Annual Meeting to present her research at the meeting on January 25-27 in Minot, North Dakota. Her presentation was titled **“Searching for virulence factors in *Ascochyta rabiei*”**.



7 - Jessica Schallon presenting at the 2026 Pulse Crops Working Group Annual Meeting in Minot, North Dakota.

Dr. Weidong Chen, Dr. Kiwamu Tanaka, Dr. Hira Kamal, and Dr. Bing Liu attended the **National Sclerotinia Initiative (NSI) Annual Meeting 2026** in Fargo, North Dakota, on January 21-22, 2026. Dr. Chen and Dr. Tanaka are leading projects funded through USDA ARS NSI funding. Dr. Kamal delivered an oral presentation titled **“Necrotic and Margin-specific Transcriptional and Metabolic Reprogramming during *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* Infection.”** Dr. Liu, a postdoctoral researcher in Dr. Chen’s lab, presented her talk, **“Temporal Infection Dynamics and Differential PGP-Associated Responses in Chickpea following *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* Inoculation.”** Dr. Tanaka also served as moderator for the session **“*Sclerotinia* Research Progress – Gene Discovery & Pathogen Biology.”**



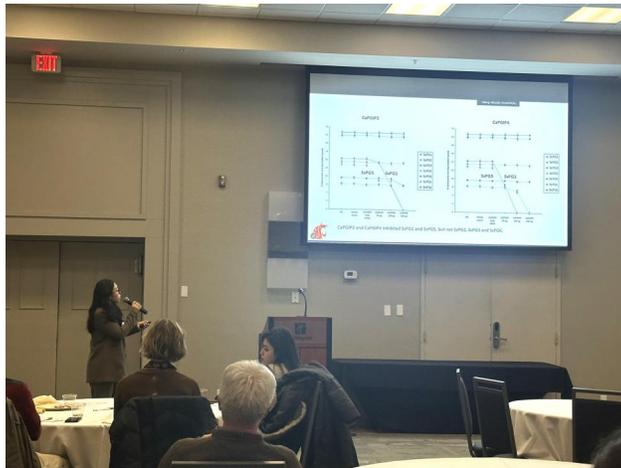
8 - Dr. Weidong Chen, Dr. Hira Kamal, Dr. Bing Liu, and Dr. Kiwamu Tanaka, attending the National Sclerotinia Annual Meeting 2026 in North Dakota. Photo source: Dr. Hira Kamal.



9 - Dr. Tanaka moderating the session Sclerotinia Research Progress – Gene Discovery & Pathogen Biology. Photo source: Dr. Hira Kamal.



10 - Dr. Hira Kamal delivering an oral presentation titled "Necrotic and Margin-specific Transcriptional and Metabolic Reprogramming during *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* Infection." Photo source: Dr. Hira Kamal.



11 - Dr. Liu, presenting a talk on "Temporal Infection Dynamics and Differential PGIP-Associated Responses in Chickpea following *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* Inoculation." Photo source: Dr. Hira Kamal.

On February 11, **Dr. Sean McCotter**, a postdoctoral researcher in Dr. Cynthia Gleason's lab, and **Olga Mamontova**, a technician in Dr. Hanu Pappu's lab, were married.

We extend our sincere congratulations to Sean and Olga on their wedding.

Mount Vernon Updates

Berry and Potato Pathology team members (**Chakradhar Mattupalli, Francely Flores Pablo, and Adam Elcan**) attended the **2026 Washington & Oregon Potato Conference** in Kennewick, WA, on January 29-30, 2026. Chakradhar Mattupalli presented a talk titled 'Management of potato black dot', and Francely Flores Pablo presented a talk in Spanish titled 'How to scout for potato diseases.'



12 - Francely Flores gave a lively and engaging presentation in Spanish, including using a "papa caliente" ("hot potato"), titled 'How to scout for potato diseases'.



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14 - Francely Flores gave a lively and engaging presentation in Spanish, including using a "papa caliente" ("hot potato"), titled 'How to scout for potato diseases'.

Congratulations to **Mary Steele** on being selected as a **2026 [WSU Woman of Distinction](#) in the Graduate Student category!** She will receive the award on **Thursday, March 26, 2026**, at the Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center, Pullman. This prestigious award recognize women who: a) have distinguished themselves in academic work, career, leadership, public service, or any combination thereof; b) have contributed to the personal growth and success of others, especially women, through education, research, or public volunteer service beyond expected job responsibilities; and c) have created positive social change, increased equality for all, and helped build community through service.

A new [video](#) produced for the **Stop the Rot onion bacterial disease project** summarizes practical management strategies for onion bacterial diseases based on six years of multi-state research and extension efforts. The project involved onion specialists from 12 universities and was funded by the USDA Specialty Crops Research Initiative (2019–2025).

Dr. Lindsey du Toit served as Project Director for this \$4.2M grant, with Heather MacKay (2019-2023) followed by Wendy Britton (2023-2025) as Project Manager. The [video](#) was produced in collaboration with the CAHNRS Communications team (Matt Ziegler and Darrell Kilgore) and is available on the [Stop the Rot](#) website, along with additional [resources](#).

Prosser Updates

Dr. Youfu Zhao delivered a series of presentations across Washington and Oregon in January and February 2026, providing growers and industry professionals with updates on fire blight and bacterial canker management. Dr. Zhao presented at the following events:

- The 83rd Cherry Institute, “**Post 2023 Bacterial Canker outbreak in WA: An update**”. January 7, 2026. Yakima Convention Center.
- 2026 North Central Washington Stone Fruit Day, “**Field trials for preventing bacterial canker from heading cut on young trees**”. January 21, 2026. Wenatchee Convention Center.
- 2026 GS Long Field Staff Meeting, “**Post 2023 Bacterial Canker outbreak in WA: An update**”. January 22, 2026. Yakima Convention Center.
- WTFRC Apple protection review, “**Key learnings from the 4th International Fire Blight Symposium**”. January 28, 2026. Yakima Valley College Conference Center.
- 2026 Oregon Cherry Day, “**Post 2023 Bacterial Canker outbreak in WA: An update**”. February 18, 2026. Columbia Gorge Discover Center.

Wenatchee Updates

On February 01, graduate students at TFREC went bowling at Eastmont Lanes, East Wenatchee.

On February 06, the graduate students at TFREC had the opportunity to learn about the **post-harvest life of apples and cherries** by visiting **McDougall and Sons**. Students were able to see 'Envy' apples being processed on the line. Thank you to Adam Snyder for this incredible tour and opportunity to learn more about this important aspect of the tree fruit industry. Special thanks also to Dr. Lee Kalcsits for helping organize this opportunity.

Graduate students in attendance: **Aalok Mishra, Abu Sina Md Tushar**, David Gonzalez, Gabriela Bolaños, Alicia Mehling, Yongbo Song, and Ruihan Liu.



15 - Graduate student at TFREC went bowling. Photo source: Aalok Mishra.



16 - Graduate students at TFREC visiting the packing house of McDougall and Sons. Photo source: Aalok Mishra.



17 - Graduate students at TFREC visiting McDougall and Sons. Photo source: Aalok Mishra.

GPSA Updates

OneDrive storage quotas take effect **April 15** due to university-wide Microsoft storage limits; 97% of students are already under 1 GB and will not be affected, and no data will be deleted. Current students exceeding 1 GB will receive a temporary buffer, while students enrolling after April 15 will begin with a 1 GB quota. The buffer is supported by one-time ITS funding through June 30, 2027.

Herbarium Happenings: Shaw Mycological Herbarium



Plant Pathology Lab class... 100 Years Ago!

The Shaw Herbarium contains not only roughly 90,000 fungal specimens, but also many other historical items from the past 110 years of the WSU Plant Pathology Department - old photos and prints, class grade books, obsolete lab equipment, classic mycological books and journals, etc. One of the most intriguing photographs that surfaced while our department was emptying out of the old Johnson Hall third floor in early 2022 is the one shown here, found in an envelope labeled only "Plant Pathology Lab".

Further details of this classroom scene remained a mystery until recently, when Monique Slipher found time for some in-depth sleuthing at WSU's Manuscripts, Archives & Special Collections (MASC) section of Terrell Library. With the generous help of expert archivists Mark O'English and Will Gregg, we gradually uncovered a more complete story of the photo. When first established in 1915, our department was housed in Science Hall (now Murrow), but later moved to the 3rd floor of Wilson Hall (now Wilson-Short) when that building was completed in the fall of 1920. Since the window frames visible in the photo match those in old pictures of

Wilson Hall (see the second photo here), we determined the classroom scene dated to that year or later. Using WSU yearbooks and course catalogs from the 1920's, we narrowed the time frame to 1921-1923, and the classroom to Room 308. From that we could track down the young professor in the back of the room as Bliss F. Dana, a 1916 WSC graduate in Botany who soon joined Plant Pathology as Instructor and later Assistant Professor up until 1927. (The Herbarium contains many specimens collected by Dana during his tenure on faculty).

Interesting details to note in this delightful glimpse of the past include the early movie projector behind Dana, old microscopes, the 1920's haircuts, suits and ties on the male students, and the one pioneering female student in the right front corner. Then there are the dozens of large glass jars lining the shelves along the back wall... Some readers may remember some of those same pickled fungal specimens still in Dr. Jack Rogers' teaching classroom in Johnson Hall until 2022, a hundred years later!



18 - Plant Pathology laboratory class in 3rd floor of Wilson Hall, instructed by Bliss F. Dana (c. 1922)



19 - Wilson Hall shortly after completion in 1920 - Plant Pathology Department was housed on 3rd floor from 1920 to 1960.

Publications



Harper, S. J., Pitino, M., Walker Iii, W. B., Easterling, K. A., Marshall, A. T., Cowell, S. J., ... and Cooper, W. R. 2026. Differences in 'Candidatus Phytoplasma pruni' gene expression when infecting sweet cherry versus leafhoppers. *PhytoFrontiers™*, PHYTOFR-06.

<https://doi.org/10.1094/PHYTOFR-06-25-0062-R>

Jablonski, N. D., Fishburn, F. M., Schulz, L. L., Kaur, H., Kuhl, J. C., Xiao, F., **Gleason, C.**, ... and Caplan, A. B. 2026. Organic acids produced by *Solanum sisymbriifolium* contribute to its resistance against nematodes. *Physiological and Molecular Plant Pathology*, 143, 103145.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmpp.2026.103145>

Ko, I., and Rice, D. 2026. Small samples, big problems, statistical tests in nematology research need power. *Journal of Nematology*, 57(1), 20250062. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jofnem-2025-0062>

Nickerson, M. N., Tfaily, M. M., Meredith, L. K., and **U'Ren, J. M.** 2026. Fungal microbiome-metabolome relationships in *Sphagnum* and two co-occurring Alaskan mosses. *Molecular Ecology*, 35(2), e70242. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mec.70242>

Sharma, R., **Wang, M., Chen, X.**, Carver, B. F., Guttieri, M., St. Amand, P., ... and Aoun, M. 2026. Identification of stripe rust adult plant resistance genes in the hard winter wheat cultivar Baker's Ann. *The Plant Genome*, 19(1), e70198. <http://doi.org/10.1002/tpg2.70198>

Shires, M. K., Molnar, C., **Hoskins, M. C.**, and **Harper, S. J.** 2026. First report of a 'Candidatus Phytoplasma pruni'-related strain associated with chlorosis and decline of *Artemisia tridentata* in Washington State. *Plant Disease*. <https://doi.org/10.1094/PDIS-08-25-1663-PDN>

Ullah, A., Din, A. U., Rahman, S. U., **Gnanasekaran, P.**, Zhai, Y., Rahat, M. A., **Pappu, H. R.**, Ahmad, N., and Akbar, F. (2026). Molecular characterization of begomoviruses infecting diverse plant species in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *Australasian Plant Pathology*, 55(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13313-026-01112-2>

Upadhaya, S. G., Gleason, C., Zasada, I. A., Chavoshi, S., **Upadhaya, A.**, Mayad, E. H., ... and **Paulitz, T. C.** 2026. Artificial intelligence-based tools for automated genus-level identification of plant-parasitic nematodes. *Phytopathology*, (ja). <https://doi.org/10.1094/PHYTO-10-25-0330-R>

Please let us know if we missed your publication so we can include it next month.

Funding and Opportunities



GPSA Excellence Awards

- The Graduate and Professional Student Association conducts the GPSA Excellence Awards each year to recognize the fantastic work of students, advisors, student organizations, and more. Nominations are open from February 16, 2026, to March 13, 2026. More information can be found [here](#).

Plant Health 2026

- Abstract submissions are now being accepted for August 1-4, Plant Health 2026 in Providence, Rhode Island. The submission deadline is March 20, 2026. Please visit [here](#).

APS Foundation Awards and Funding Opportunities

- Several APS Foundation awards are now open for the year. The deadline for many applications is February 28. More details can be found [here](#).

GPSA Travel Grant

- GPSA travel grants are available all year round and are awarded as reimbursements post-travel for out-of-pocket travel costs. Pullman Service and Activity fee-paying students are eligible to apply. Please see all the information on the GPSA grants website [here](#). Contact gpsa.granst@wsu.edu if you have questions.

[Here](#) is a list of all available funding worldwide. Log in using your WSU account and refine the search.

Seminars



Dr. Cynthia Gleason is leading the seminar in Spring 2026, on most Mondays from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting ID: 959 0545 7360

Zoom Password: 2488

- January 26: **Cynthia Gleason** (Seminar Instructor, WSU)
- February 2: **Sudeep Poudel** (Student Speaker)
- February 9: **Prabu Gnanasekaran** (Guest Speaker, WSU)
- February 16: Holiday
- February 23: **Anthony DeLuca** (Student Speaker)
- March 2: **Eric Holmes** (Guest Speaker, University of Idaho)
- March 9: **Francely Flores** (Student Speaker)
- March 16: Spring Break

- March 23: **Elaine Larsen** (Student Speaker)
- March 30: **Kylie Swisher Grimm** (Guest Speaker, USDA)
- April 6: **Chakradhar Mattupalli** (Guest Speaker, WSU)
- April 13: **Jeremy Johnson** (Student Speaker)
- April 20: **Kara Lanning** (Student Invited Speaker, Pacific University, Oregon)
- April 27- **Oleksandra Shabliy** (Student Speaker)

Jobs



Postdoctoral Positions

- The Emerging Pests and Pathogens Research Unit (EPPRU), located in Ithaca, New York, on the campus of **Cornell University**, is seeking a post-doctoral fellow focused on the molecular biology of plant pathogenic bacteria. The application details can be found [here](#).

- Four postdoctoral fellowship positions are available to work with the **USDA-ARS** in Wapato, WA. For more information about the location, visit [here](#).
 - Plant-Pathogen-Vector Interactions: For more details and to apply, visit [here](#).
 - Molecular Plant-Pathogen Interactions and Sustainable Protection: For more information and to apply, visit [here](#).
 - Insect genomics/RNA interference: The position is listed [here](#).
 - Postdoctoral Research Associate: Email Gina.Angelella@usda.gov for more information.

Industry, and Other Non-Academic Positions

- **Washington State Department of Agriculture** is seeking a candidate for the position of Fruit Tree Certification Lab Supervisor, based in Prosser. The application and details are available [here](#).

Faculty Positions

- The Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology of the **University of Arkansas** System Division of Agriculture invites applications for a non-tenure-track faculty position in the Cooperative Extension Service with emphasis on diseases of rice and other major crops in Arkansas and the mid-South. More information is available for the [Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology](#) and [RREC](#).
- **Washington State University** is looking for an associate or full Professor for the Rosalie and Harold Rea Brown Distinguished Endowed Chair in Plant Pathology to lead plant diseases in Pacific Northwest dryland cropping systems. The applicant screening will begin on March 3, 2026. For full details and to apply, visit [here](#).