



Name:	Gilli Thorp
Job Title:	Plant Pathologist
Organisation:	The Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA)
Qualifications:	A levels in biology, geography and chemistry BSc degree in biology, York University
Salary:	£20,000 - £25,000

About me and my job:

I have always had an interest in nature and enjoyed biology and geography at school. I design, carry out and manage project work on the epidemiology and control of both indigenous and non indigenous plant pathogenic fungi. This involves carrying out lab and field experiments, analysing results and writing reports. My main areas of speciality are fungicide efficacy trials on pathogens such as *Fusarium* on wheat and downy mildews. I also research the management and control of disease outbreaks such as *Phytophthora ramorum* (Sudden Oak Death) and *Chalara fraxinea* (Ash dieback).

The UK is under constant threat from invading pathogens, which could have a massive impact on both food production and our environment. It is surprising how many pathogens are out there that we know absolutely nothing about. I most enjoy the variety in my role; I can be working on numerous different pathogens and carrying out analysis using more traditional methods such as microscopy and agar testing to advanced molecular methods such as real time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and sequencing. I enjoy carrying out applied research knowing that the output will be of use to farmers, policy makers and the wider public. I got into my career by applying for a job advert in the *New Scientist* for an assistant entomologist at FERA. I have now been working at FERA for almost twelve years although now working in the field of plant pathology rather than insects.

Advice about the sector:

To enter at the basic grades, only GCSEs in science subjects are required. However, some practical experience is always a good idea. At FETA there is an in post progression scheme, which requires interviews and a two year probation period, or you can apply for internally advertised jobs. We all set development objectives and there are always opportunities to attend courses both internally and externally in order to advance your training. Be prepared to carry out mundane and repetitive tasks. Nothing ever works quite as planned in biology so you have to be prepared to be flexible and constantly adapt and make changes. Research methods are always advancing so it is important to read a lot of research papers to keep up to date. Plant pathologists carry out a very important role; no matter what your interest there is bound to be a job in plant pathology that will suit you from plant breeding, genetics, epidemiology and field trials to more office based pest risk assessment.