**DEPI Chambers**

## Background / Why DEPI

For decades, scientists have studied photosynthesis with sophisticated instruments under carefully controlled lab conditions. This approach has a provided detailed picture of the core components of this essential biological process that has powered and sustained life for over a billion years. However, controlled laboratory conditions may mask mechanisms plants have evolved to regulate photosynthesis in natural environments. For example, deleting genes that affect photosynthesis in some cases has no effect on growth under constant light intensities, but growth (and photosynthesis) under typical fluctuating intensities found outdoors is severely inhibited. In order to understand how photosynthesis operates and is regulated in nature, we need to perform laboratory experiments under ‘field-relevant’ conditions.

So why not just run experiments in the field? Obtaining reproducible results is more risky when conditions in the field change constantly and, as in many cases, unpredictably. In addition, if the experimenter is unlucky, field conditions may run counter to the experimental design (e.g. testing for drought tolerance during a wet calendar year), leading to wasted time and research funds.

## What is the DEPI

Created in the [lab of David Kramer](https://prl.natsci.msu.edu/people/faculty/david-m-kramer/), the Dynamic Environmental Photosynthetic Imager, or **DEPI, was designed to bridge the gap between the laboratory and the field**. DEPI can reproducibly simulate dynamic changes (or playback recorded field conditions) occurring in natural environments and continuously monitor the photosynthetic performance of plants in high throughput. The core of DEPI consists of a **lighting array of high power white LEDs** capable of delivering up to full sunlight intensities (>2000 µmols photons m-2 sec-1) at a distance of 50 cm from soil level. Its features include:

* **Computer-controlled simulations of light intensity changes** that occur in the field throughout a solar day.
* **Multiple cameras** to simultaneously image all of the plants growing under the lighting canopy, allowing for continuous monitoring with a time resolution that is not possible using robotic systems.
* **A support team that routinely runs experiments** that image as many as 250 Arabidopsis plants up to 130 times per day in a single DEPI chamber.
* Enclosing this core apparatus inside a plant growth chamber allows experimental control of other environmental parameters including temperature, humidity and CO2 concentration, as the chamber allows.
* **Plants can be measured without shifting them** from the conditions under which they are grown.

**Movie of DEPI in action.**

## What parameters can DEPI track?

DEPI typically captures chlorophyll fluorescence images that can be used to track multiple photosynthetic parameters including:

* Maximum efficiency (FV/FM)
* Photosynthetic efficiency (ϕII)
* Photoprotection (NPQ, qE, qI)
* Growth

Alternative imaging methods also allow monitoring of:

* Chloroplast movement (reflectance imaging)
* Leaf Movements (infrared imaging)
* Changes in stomatal conductance (thermal imaging)

## The Facilities

**Currently CAAPP hosts 5 high capacity DEPI chambers (20 ft2 or ~2 m2) that can hold up to 8 flats containing as many as 31, 6.5 cm x 6.5 cm pots. Four of these large DEPI chambers have adjustable canopies that allow the lighting to be raised ~1 m above soil level to accommodate larger plant species.**

**In addition, CAAPP has 10 lower capacity chambers (1 to 2 flat capacity) smaller experiments. To allow more directed experiments, some of these DEPI chambers have extended environmental controls including:**

* Freezing temperature (-5ºC)
* Supplemental CO2
* Scrubbing to allow precise control over CO2 concentration between ~50 ppm (low) to 2000 ppm (high)

## Contact and Booking

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For scheduling DEPI experiments, contact Nathan Galbreath at [galbre12@msu.edu](mailto:galbre12@msu.edu) (616) 550-1266.