ASA Looks Back at 2004

Strategic planning, planning for restructuring the ASA Board, and the relationship among the three Societies was the major focus for 2004. We began the year with a leadership workshop in Madison, WI, where we focused on what we wanted the American Society of Agronomy to be in the future and we concluded that ASA embraces both the scientific and the application of science to agriculture and the environment.

ASA’s structural change is the most complex of the three Societies because it serves as the overall business entity for the three Societies. The ASA Board authorized the Executive Committee to proceed with the proposed structural change for the ASA Board and for the management functions for the Societies.

The year culminated with the Annual Meeting in Seattle, WA, with above-average attendance. ASA membership dropped again this year, largely due to members joining fewer of the Societies. However, ASA remains strong financially and we have largely recovered from the post 9/11 drop in our portfolio value.

We closed the year with each of the Societies becoming more independent by restructuring, but realizing the value of the synergy that exists as we operate collaboratively.

‘Watershed Year’ for CSSA

In many ways 2004 was a watershed year for CSSA. We began the year with concerns over declining membership and less-than-encouraging financial projections. By year’s end, CSSA membership actually grew by nearly 6% and our financial position was stronger than it had been. Moreover, owing mostly to increased revenues from CSSA publications, we were able to forestall a planned increase in membership dues for 2005.

Perhaps less tangible than these objective measures of society health, but more significant in the long run, was a major restructuring of society leadership. The new structure reduces the number of voting members serving on the board of directors from 27 to 11. The board now consists of the executive committee and division board representatives each serving a three-year term. Our hope is that this new structure will lead to a greater sharing of leadership through increased engagement of board members, with more agility and responsiveness in managing future challenges and opportunities. Only time will tell of course, but there is good reason to be optimistic that this change in leadership structure will have a lasting and positive impact on CSSA.

Our science is essential to ensuring a safe and plentiful food supply and is vital to the continued well-being of humankind. We look forward to an even brighter future as we continue to grow through discovery and innovation.

SSSA: Planning for Action

In 2004, SSSA undertook an effort to address the changing nature of our discipline. We recognize that how SSSA adapts to these changes will define our future. We developed a 2005–2010 Strategic Plan that reflects the broadening interests of our members, the need to build stronger working relationships with practicing professional soil scientists, and a renewed commitment to students and early career members. The Strategic Plan is used by the SSSSA Executive Committee, the Board, and headquarters to guide all SSSA actions.

One of the initiatives in the Strategic Plan is a commitment to the certification and licensing of professional soil scientists. In 2004, SSSA assumed responsibility for the national licensing program and we are committed to increasing the number of states offering licensing programs.

Finally, I am happy to report that SSSA membership is growing and that our Society is fiscally strong. SSSA membership increased in each of the past two years, our bottom line is positive, and our investment portfolio increased in value to >$1.8 million.

Changes are ahead, new opportunities are emerging, and SSSA has the vision and the plan needed to build a stronger, more diverse, and dynamic Society for our members.

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A Look Back at 2004

The past year brought significant change within both the form of the Societies and the functions of headquarters in support of our membership. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA all began discussions of Society structure and efficiencies in March 2004. Meanwhile, the headquarters office restructured departments (Membership, Publications, Meetings, Science Policy, Development, Accounting and Information Technology/Operations) and welcomed several new staff members, including Michela Cobb as Director of Financial Services.

In 2004, financial adjustments were made of nearly $5 million across the Societies to correctly allocate prior years’ deferred revenue, making it clear that neither CSSA or SSSA were in debt as previously thought. The Societies sought new portfolio investment management by hiring Smith Barney in May 2004. Through stewardship of existing funds and continued investment growth, the ASA-CSSA-SSSA portfolio increased from approximately $7.8 million in 2003 to over $12 million by the end of 2004.

Information Technology

In 2004, the Information Technology (IT) Department made changes to improve efficiency. We now have a CD Replicator. Using this, we now produce our own CDs for Abstracts, Year-End CDs for all of our Journals, and Reprints also come with a CD. This has led to a decrease in costs, keeping prices down for subscribers. We also now have a color printer for cost-effective printing.

The phone system has been reconfigured with direct numbers for all staff and a more automated approach to help callers find the correct department for assistance.

Also in 2004, an innovative, online awards system was developed for both nominating and judging of scholarships, awards, and fellows. This system has made it easier for nominators, references, and committee members.

Finally, we have completely redesigned all of our webpages. This makes information easier to find, and cleans up the pages’ appearance.

Publications

Several accomplishments were achieved in the Publications Department during 2004 involving both our journal and book programs.

In 2004, the journals published research from a wide variety of disciplines, featuring 92 different topics. ASA-CSSA-SSSA journals continue to be influential publications as indicated by our 2003 Thomson ISI ranking of total cites. Soil Science Society of America Journal ranked first in total cites and fourth in impact factor.

The journals did very well financially in 2004 as a result of an increase in nonmember subscriptions for individual journals; though the journal packages were not picked up as expected. We released the back issue CD sets of our journals (www.asa-cssa-sssa.org/journals), and sales for all of the sets are encouraging.

The issue of journal timeliness was addressed and is improving over 2003 numbers due to the online submission/review process and the vigilance of the editorial boards. In an effort to improve the manuscript submission process, authors of accepted and released manuscripts had the opportunity to complete an online survey about the submission and review process.

The possibility of outsourcing the ASA-CSSA-SSSA book program received considerable discussion in 2004. Weighing the pros and cons of outsourcing vs. keeping book publishing in-house continues into 2005.

A Look Back at 2004

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“I am trying to do anything that I can to give back to the Societies because the Societies have helped my career a lot. I present research at the meetings, write in the journals, review manuscripts, and participate on several committees.”

— Palle Pedersen, Iowa State University
Science Policy

The Washington DC Science Policy Office is increasingly recognized by policymakers as a leading voice and advocate in developing national science policies. Through coalition activities and a new-and-expanding grassroots advocacy effort, the Science Policy Office has extended its reach and impact on policy making.

Achievements include playing a role through our electronic grassroots resource (www.SciencePolicyAction.org) and coalition efforts in achieving a record funding level of $180+ million for the National Research Initiative in Fiscal Year 2005. We also continued, through our participation with other coalitions, to achieve increased funding for research across federal agencies.

The Science Policy Office served in an educational capacity, providing a briefing concerning biotechnology to the Food & Drug Administration, and another briefing on Intellectual Property Rights for Senate and House Agriculture Committees and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Rapid Response Teams have provided their scientific expertise in developing comments for proposed rules and regulations and serve as scientific resources to Congress. Additionally in 2004, the Biosecurity Committee selected ASA-CSSA member Paul Umbeck as its Biosecurity Point Person to assist the Societies in becoming leaders in the biosecurity debate and contribute toward safeguarding agriculture and food systems.

Finally, our office played a role in addressing various proposed rules and regulations in areas of agriculture, conservation, and the environment.

Certification

Seeking to better align the scientific organizations with the professional certification programs, in 2004 SSSA assumed responsibility for the soils-oriented certifications, Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS) and Certified Professional Soil Classifier (CPSC). ASA retained the agronomy-focused certifications, Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) and Certified Professional Agronomist (CPAg). The ARCPACs acronym will be retained for legislative reasons. Soil scientists from around the country developed a document to assist states in beginning or continuing licensing efforts for soil scientists. In addition, SSSA started a program to match up to $5,000 of a state’s soil science licensing efforts. The CCA Program expanded its efforts in Washington DC and its marketing efforts in 2004. The focus remains on the Technical Service Provider program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resource Conservation Service. CCAs represent over 50% of the TSP’s delivering conservation technical assistance.

ASF: Envision the Future

The Agronomic Science Foundation continued to envision a strong future by increasing its support of ASA-CSSA-SSSA in 2004. Gifts of more than $150,000 supported lectures, scholarships, awards, and international programs.

Major 2004 development initiatives included exploring a potential journal on plant genomics, the Smithsonian Soils Exhibit, and an annual meeting sponsorship program. Four new programs were launched: the Robert F Barnes Graduate Student Award, the Leo M. Walsh Soil Fertility Distinguished Lectureship, the L.R. Ahuja Ag Systems Modeling Fellowship, and an international member scholarship program.

In 2005, ASF plans to focus on the $4 million Smithsonian Soils Exhibit Campaign, the $2 million CSSA 50th Anniversary Golden Opportunity Campaign, and a program for the ASA Centennial.

Thank you to the nearly 900 members and organizations with almost $500,000 in gifts and pledges. This is an all-time record and a 55% increase over last year’s participation. For more information, visit www.a-s-f.org.
Meetings & Conventions

With the new year came the formation of the Department of Meetings and Conventions. The department provides logistical support for the Societies’ International Annual Meetings, branch meetings, and related agronomic, crops and soils meetings.

We began an Annual Meetings Internship Program at the 2004 meetings in Seattle to provide students with an opportunity to earn cash while helping headquarters staff with meeting functions. The program establishes outreach and goodwill with undergraduate and graduate students. We had 70 students sign up to fill 31 intern spots.

The “Day at the Meetings” was also an exciting first for our Annual Meetings. Working with local colleges, we brought liberal arts students from the area to our meetings to experience world-class scientific meetings. By participating, they learned about opportunities for study in agronomy, soils, crops, and environmental sciences. In addition, the Societies were able to showcase their sciences to prospective graduate students and future members.

Membership Services

Several new programs were developed by the Membership Services Department in 2004 with high degrees of success. Science in Action, an electronic newsletter highlighting scientific journal summaries was introduced. Members are able to select from 15 keywords to receive the latest research in their discipline, delivered via email as a benefit of membership.

The “Discover the Value of Membership” campaign launched, focusing on the key components of membership in the Societies: Connections, Career Advancement, Research Publications, Networking, and Professional Visibility. The Societies’ best membership spokespeople—satisfied members—are making their presence known. The “Advance a Colleague’s Career” membership campaign, with members referring colleagues, is beginning to bear fruit and more professionals are discovering the value of membership in ASA, CSSA, and SSSA.

The total number of individual members (regardless of how many Societies they belong to) is at 10,861 individual members including Active, Student, Emeritus, and Sustaining members.

In 2004, 775 new members joined one, two, or three Societies, a 14% increase over 2003. With many members holding multiple Society memberships, the end of 2004 saw total memberships of 17,709, a slight drop of 246 total memberships. Overall, ASA saw a 6% decline, while CSSA and SSSA have seen membership increases of 5.6% and 1.5%, respectively.

“It is a very valuable experience to be able to interact with society members during the Annual Meetings. The meetings are a great experience for our undergraduate members to display research, knowledge, and enthusiasm for their areas of study.”

—Courtney Thomas, Colorado State University and 2004 President, Students of Agronomy, Soils, and Environmental Sciences (SASES)
Looking Forward to 2005 and Beyond

For headquarters, our major activity in 2005 will be overhauling our entire Information Technology system, integrating accounting, membership, meetings, and publications for the first time. Susan Chapman joined the Societies as Membership Director in late 2004 and is identifying programs and services for implementation in the future. We have a new Publications Director, Fran Katz, and are continuing to evaluate our book publishing activities. Additionally, the auditing firm Clifton Gunderson has been hired and they will meet with the executives and budget and finance committees this summer.

Publications: All of the ASA-CSSA-SSSA journals will move to continuous publication in 2005. HighWire journals will still be published on the same schedule, but will go online in two batches. We continue to evaluate how we may reduce the time from manuscript submission to publication. Additionally, we will assess the potential impact that open-access publishing may have on the financial position of our activities. For manuscript submission and review in 2005, Crop Science is shifting from Manuscript Tracker to the more robust Manuscript Central. Benefits of changing are being considered for our other journals.

Science Policy: In 2005, the Societies will continue to develop grassroots education and advocacy through our online resource, www.SciencePolicyAction.org that includes action alerts to legislative leaders. Hand-in-hand with this is the identification and development of a group of member “Citizen Scientists” in Congressional districts/states who can participate in more local-level educational briefings and press events with their congressional delegates. An ongoing goal for 2005 is to increase research funding for agronomic, crop, and soil sciences.

Meetings: New for 2005 is a partnership with Conference Exchange to provide an online abstract submission process. The sophisticated system allows authors to include graphs, charts, and tables in their abstract, and provides for presentations to be recorded and posted online. Upcoming meetings include: the Western Society of Crop Science Meeting in Bozeman, MT, June 19–22, 2005; the ASA-CSSA-SSSA International Annual Meetings in Salt Lake City, UT, Nov. 6–10, 2005; and the 18th World Congress of Soil Science in Philadelphia, PA, July 9–15, 2006.

Information Technology: For 2005, the Information Technology Department is migrating to a new computer system that is specifically designed for member-based associations. The advanced system will be able to migrate information in and out of each department, while maintaining the most up-to-date information on each of our members. Externally, members will notice more information available on our websites, and have more access to and control of the latest information, whether it is ordering a book, subscribing to a journal, paying an invoice, renewing a membership, or registering for a meeting.

Certification: The Certified Crop Adviser program will continue to work to improve the Technical Service Provider program and expand the opportunities for CCAs to participate in this program in 2005. The International Certified Crop Adviser Board of Directors, together with the ASA Board of Directors, will be evaluating the concept of making the CCA Program an independently incorporated entity. Either outcome would continue a strong and positive relationship with ASA.

Membership: Beginning in 2005, two programs working in tandem will increase the availability of Society memberships and journals to the best and brightest scientists around the world. For members in the World Bank’s list of low-income countries, membership is just $25. Additionally, the Agronomic Science Foundation will match half of this rate, or $12.50, for those whom even the reduced membership rate is a hardship. Also in 2005, undergraduate membership will get a boost as individual student club members will receive true membership status and benefits previously not available to them.

“During my 30 years overseas, involving teaching, research, and development work in soil science and agronomy, the Societies have been my professional lifeline. They help me stay current in my field and I feel that I have an identity as part of an international scientific body. Membership of the Society is both a stimulus and a challenge.” —John Ryan, International Center for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas
Dynamic Year for ASA

We are entering a dynamic era for our Society as a result of shifting membership demographics, evolving models for scientific publications, and changing priorities within our disciplines.

We have concerns in common with other scientific societies in the agriculture and natural resource fields. To explore areas of collaboration, we will be meeting with the officers of several related scientific societies in the future.

We will continue to improve the organization of the annual meetings through an emphasis on a thematic approach to sessions and symposia. In addition, the process for submission of abstracts will be simplified and authors will have the option of making their presentation or poster available for online viewing.

An additional activity in 2005 will be implementation of the ASA Board of Directors restructuring approved at the 2004 Annual Meeting. We will be considering how to ensure that ASA, CSSA, and SSSA have active involvement in management of headquarters and providing services to the membership.

I look forward to working with the ASA leadership, staff, and membership to enhance our programs in 2005.

CSSA Celebrates 50 Years

CSSA will celebrate its 50th anniversary at the 2005 Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, UT. Divisions are working together on an anniversary symposium highlighting the most significant events in their histories. Following the symposium, M.S. Swaminathan will present the Klepper lecture, “From the Green to the Evergreen Revolution.” We will also launch the Golden Opportunity project to attract students to our profession.

Due to our recent bylaw revisions, CSSA now has the flexibility and leadership structure to tackle some difficult, long-term challenges. These will be the focus of a CSSA Board of Directors retreat in Bozeman, MT, as part of the Summer Meeting of CSSA and the Western Society of Crop Science.

Perhaps the most significant big-picture issue involves the substantial reduction in formula-based funds in the federal budget. We will have to determine how we can be most effective on the national policy front.

The second major issue to consider is how scientific societies relate to our non-scientific fellow citizens. Recent headlines show that the U.S. scientific establishment is losing credibility and respect. We need to determine why this is and what can be done about it.

SSSA: Future Looks Bright

The future of SSSA is bright as we have increased membership in each of the last several years and our financial position is very positive. While many initiatives are included in our Strategic Plan, the reorganization of the Board of Directors is critical to society governance. A smaller board will enable board members to be more fully engaged, which will increase its responsiveness to the diverse issues throughout the year.

We continue to explore cooperative activities with other professional societies, and we look forward to the 18th World Congress of Soil Science (WCSS) to be held on July 9-15, 2006, in Philadelphia, PA. An exciting program will address diverse issues in soils and related sciences.

The Smithsonian Soils Exhibit is an important project as it will highlight our science and profession to millions of visitors to the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC.

SSSA is also committed to assisting states in establishing licensing and certification programs for professional soil scientists.

Thank you for your continued support of SSSA and we look forward to seeing you in Salt Lake City at our 2005 International Annual Meetings.

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Membership has helped me in linking and collaborating with scientists internationally. This has raised awareness of the issues in the areas of crops and soils which developing countries face. It has been wonderful to be a part of these outstanding Societies. I hope more scientists especially young ones in developing countries are able to be part of the Societies.”—Jagdish Ladha, International Rice Research Institute