An Agronomic Education Division of the American Society of Agronomy was first proposed in 1947. Prior to this date, activities of the resident and extension teachers in the society were, in general, loosely organized. In later years, however, two standing committees, Education and Extension Participation, were appointed by the president of the society. Through the years, interest in teaching and extension has had its “highs” and “lows” and for the most part has been directly related to the leadership available among members of the society.

Perusal of literature from 1907 up to the present time, including the Proceedings of the American Society of Agronomy, the Journal of the American Society of Agronomy, and the Agronomy Journal indicates that on the average only one paper relating to teaching and extension has been published annually. Some years were void of any papers whatsoever in the field of agronomic education.

According to these publications, several symposiums on teaching and extension were held. General subjects covered in symposiums and papers included: standardization of elementary courses in farm crops and soils, the value of laboratories in teaching; how to prepare lecture and laboratory material for effective teaching, student counselling, examinations and tests, extra-curricular activities, and teacher evaluation. In extension they included: integrating research and extension, organization of extension work, development of extension programs on soil conservation and on other specific subjects, the use of effective aids, and “selling” the extension program.

The Student Activities Section was proposed in 1921. The president of the American Society of Agronomy that year was authorized to appoint a committee to consider a national organization for agronomy students. A questionnaire was sent to the agronomy departments of 24 institutions asking for information to be used in considering the question. On the basis of this questionnaire and other correspondence in 1922 the committee recommended “that the American Society of Agronomy go on record as favoring a national organization of students in Agronomy, but believing that the initiative in the formation of such an organization be left to the students. The president appointed a committee of three to act in an advisory capacity to the students in case they attempted to launch a national organization.” According to records there was no follow-up on this recommendation (1).

In the spring of 1932 the president of the society again appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of a National Student Activities Section. This committee recommended that no immediate attempt be made to organize a division, but that the “trial period” be extended another year under the direction of the Committee on Education and Extension Teaching. The group recommended that no temporary organization was approved and a subsidiary organization of the American Society of Agronomy.

The constitution of the Student Activities Section in Article II, Section I gives as the objectives: “The increase and dissemination of knowledge and technical instruction in soils and crops and the conditions affecting them. Section III, Article 1 lists in four clauses the purposes of the organization: to stimulate interest in agronomy among college students, to foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual helpfulness among students in the different institutions asking for information to be used in considering the question. On the basis of this questionnaire and other correspondence in 1922 the committee recommended “that the American Society of Agronomy go on record as favoring a national organization of students in Agronomy, but believing that the initiative in the formation of such an organization be left to the students. The president appointed a committee of three to act in an advisory capacity to the students in case they attempted to launch a national organization.” According to records there was no follow-up on this recommendation (1).

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AGRONOMIC EDUCATION DIVISION PROPOSED

In 1947, the committees on Education and Extension Participation organized for the national meeting a program for the resident teaching and extension men. In addition, another program was developed for problems in resident teaching. Society members at these meetings indicated an interest in organizing a division to include two distinct sections: Resident and Extension Teaching. The group recommended that no immediate attempt be made to organize a division, but that the “trial period” be extended another year under the direction of the Committee on Education and Extension Teaching.

In the beginning extension men led in the development of a separate division. Members of the Extension Participation Committee expressed opinions that they would like to participate in the national meetings of the Society to keep abreast of the latest developments in research and to discuss the problems, both as to subject matter and methodology. Many believed that extension agronomists fit into Agronomy, but that this probably could be accomplished by organizing an Extension Participation Division, Agronomic Education. They said they did not mean that they would not participate in the other programs at the National Meetings.