The Road Ahead

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This title is approached with great trepidation. The crystal ball is not entirely clear. Any observations made hereafter are from the perspective of a traditional, and perhaps sheltered, Land Grant College agronomist.

The Agronomy Society has come a long way since the first meeting was held in this city about 70 years ago (31 Dec. 1907 to 1 Jan. 1908). In 1901 the word agronomist first appeared in a U.S. Department of Agriculture staff listing and three Agricultural Colleges listed agronomists. By 1907 there were approximately 200 agronomists (6). On 30 Nov. 1907 a letter was sent to these persons calling for an organizational meeting to be held during the forthcoming meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Chicago. Before the end of 1908 there were 101 charter members and two additional meetings were held—one at Ithaca, New York, in July and one at Washington, DC, in November. Amendments to the bylaws were approved at the latter meeting and discussion took place on the need for a publication. A Proceedings of the American Society of Agronomy was published in 1910 and consisted of papers presented at the 1907, 1908, and 1909 meetings. The Journal of the American Society of Agronomy replaced the Proceedings in 1913 (5).

What is the health of the Society at threescore and 10 years? In October, 1978 Society membership passed 10,360. This now may be the largest agricultural professional society in the world. While health of a professional organization is not entirely reflected by the fiscal condition, members should take great pride in a headquarters office costing about $478,000, an annual trisociety operating budget of nearly $1 million, and a headquarters staff of about 26 persons. Solvency in the short run is assured by an operating reserve. This fiscal health has been accomplished primarily by the managerial abilities of the present executive vice-president, an efficient headquarters staff, and the support of hundreds of members giving freely of their time and talents. A recent count indicated about 350 and soil technology that has provided fiber needs of America as well as a surplus to share with other less fortunate nations.

Everything on Planet Earth that has life is built of the product of green plants. Although the oceans occupy two and one-half times the space occupied by the land, they provide less than 2% of human food energy. If one assumes can be doubled, plants growing in soil provide most of the food energy for future man. Why then is the word agronomy (which encompasses crop and soil science) seldom recognized outside agriculture? In his Presidential Address, Nelson Koontz challenged each member to become a citizen and help promote the word agronomy to the public. He gave substantial reasons. Agriculture is one of the most important industries in the United States and most important industry in the world. Its present foundation and future productivity rest squarely on crop and soil science.

What is needed is a new pride in our profession and a new sense of mission. Two men sitting side by side chipping stones were asked about their work. One launched into a discussion of the monotony and drudgery, while the other stated he was helping build a beautiful cathedral. Do you concede that other professionals (lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc.) have played a more important role in America's development during the past 70 years? Our research success stories must be given more publicity in the popular press and not buried in the abstracts of scientific meetings or in scientific journals.

TEACHING

The challenge of teaching and exciting minds to understand the basic concepts of crop and soil science will increase as the threat of a world population in the 21st century looms ominously. How many persons have you told that you are involved in undergraduate student enrollment. This growth is heartening, and job opportunities were perhaps never closer. Simply put, food production will be the world's most important industry in the United States or in the world. Its present foundation and future productivity rest squarely on crop and soil science.