Building Bridges: The American Society of Agronomy and the World

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WHEN I CHOSE Building Bridges as the agenda for my year as president of the American Society of Agronomy and as the theme for the annual meeting, I could not have foretold the significance of the analogy. Cincinnati, a city of bridges, fits the theme perfectly.

Bridges serve many purposes. They provide for flow of information, connect cultures, and even political boundaries. They provide ways to build trust and respect, and to work together to bring differing views together to treat complex problems in a complex world. We can repair neglected bridges, maintain our strong bridges, build new bridges, and plan and design bridges for the future. All of these activities have been part of the history of ASA. But today's changing world will call for new bridges in 1993 and beyond.

ASA began its bridge building in the formation of the Society as we know it today, a tri-society of agronomy, crops, and soils. This triad has proved to be structurally sound, and has formed the foundation that makes us the leading agricultural scientific and professional society in the world. Let us think very hard before that bridge is weakened or dismantled.

In the 1970s, ARCPACS (American Registry of Certified Professionals in Agronomy, Crops, and Soils) took form as an ASA membership service. We took another major bridge-building step with the publication of the Journal of Environmental Quality and later the Journal of Production Agriculture, our first true ventures outside of the protected walls of agronomy. The Science Fellows program was initiated at about the same time, and the Agronomic Science Foundation was established. Program planning for the meetings took a giant step forward with the formation of the program enhancement fund and a move toward one-half posters. Collectively, these steps positioned ASA for the future—and the future is now.

The last several ASA presidential addresses have emphasized change. They have called for a more global outlook, an appreciation of the environmental issues of agronomy, and taking a new perspective of agronomy. I add to this the need to develop strong bridges outside of our profession of agronomy that will strengthen agronomy and benefit society.

Some of these recent bridges have been even joined under the capable leadership of Dr. Robert F Barnes and past ASA Executive Committees and others: I am sure there are some that I have neglected to mention specifically that are just as important as those I have reviewed here.

Major repair and renovation has been done with ASA Society activities. The Agronomic Science Foundation is showing new life, and ARCPACS (now a federation of certifying boards in agriculture, biology, environmental sciences) has been restructured efficiently to provide the representative governance for ASA activities. The National Issues Response Committee is taking on new challenges by using its newly developed expertise directory as a tool to get those knowledgeable about policy issues relating to agriculture and agronomy together with those who are asking the questions.

Publications, perhaps our most important activity, are showing new faces. The Journal of Production Agriculture is the most renovated, with a new reader-friendly format that will enhance its already strong image. The Journal of Alternative Agriculture is trying new things and has a broadened scope to go with the new name. These publications are signposts of the future of our Society. They give new emphasis to multidisciplinary research and teaching programs, and outlets to scientists and educators striving to prove their mettle to their peers in reviewed publications.

A possible new bridge is in the planning stage with the Henry Wallace Institute of Alternative Agriculture. We are discussing the establishment of a joint venture, hopefully to be shared by several other cooperating societies with the Journal of Alternative Agriculture. This bridge will provide another outlet for publication of related alternative agriculture research for our scientists, particularly those engaged in multidisciplinary research.

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