LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The annual editorial board meeting of the *Agronomy Journal* (AJ) was held on 5 Nov. 2003 in Denver, CO. Various issues were presented and discussed, and several new policies were adopted by the editorial board. Also, it is important to inform our readership about a number of items that have been raised or implemented during the past year. These issues originated from the ASA Executive Committee, ASA Budget and Finance Committee, the Editorial Policy Coordination Committee, and from me as editor.

**Electronic submissions.** The AJ editorial board adopted an official policy that all submissions must be electronic and must be submitted through Manuscript Tracker beginning 1 Jan. 2004. Thus, submitting paper copies of manuscripts is no longer acceptable, and all manuscripts must be submitted directly into Manuscript Tracker. The web address for Manuscript Tracker is www.manuscripttracker.com/aj/. New manuscripts should not be submitted to the editor or other AJ editorial board members.

**New publication fee.** The ASA Budget and Finance Committee has changed the publication charges for AJ. Starting 1 Jan. 2004, a new publication fee is in effect for manuscripts submitted in 2004. The publication fee for AJ is $450.00 for members and $700.00 for nonmembers. The publication fee replaces page charges and is assessed on a per-manuscript basis; however, costs associated with figures and illustrations still apply and are in addition to the publication fee.

**Preparation of manuscripts.** *Agronomy Journal* uses a double-blind review, which means that reviewers do not know author names and authors do not know reviewer names. Given that all manuscripts are now being submitted through Manuscript Tracker, authors must prepare their manuscripts without any author information. The first page of the manuscript should contain the title and abstract. No author names, affiliations/addresses, or acknowledgments should be found within the paper. Tables, figures, headers, and footers should not contain any revealing information with regard to author names. Also, authors should make sure that authorship is not unintentionally revealed by computer software in options such as document summaries and properties.

When authors submit a manuscript via Manuscript Tracker, they will be asked to enter contact information into the system database, and the editor and technical editors will have access to this information so that they can contact the authors about the outcome of the review. Once the manuscript is accepted, authors will receive an email from Headquarters asking them to prepare a cover page (that includes the title, author names, affiliations/addresses, and acknowledgments) as part of the final version of the manuscript and to send a printed copy and word processing file of the final version to Headquarters.

**Time in review.** By unanimous vote, the editorial board established the time allowed for reviewers to complete reviews for a particular manuscript to be 30 days. 1. How does one judge a paper to be excellent? Is it based on how often it is cited, its creativity, how well it is written, its impact? Determining the specific criteria to recognize excellent papers published in ASA–CSSA–SSSA journals did not offer much detail regarding specifics of how to read: “Review and interpretation papers may be published, by invitation from the editor; however, when authors of review and interpretation papers submit a paper without invitation and it is determined that the authors of these papers do not complete revisions within that time period may have their manuscripts released. The editorial board agreed to adhere closely to this time limit, and authors beyond this should only be granted by unanimous vote. Associate editors.

**Excellent paper award.** Following a meeting of the ASA Executive Committee held in March 2003, an associate editor was asked to respond to a proposal for creating an award to recognize excellent papers published in AJ. Of the limited number of board members who responded, many favored the idea of recognizing excellent papers published in the journal. The ASA Executive Committee met in July 2003 and further discussed the topic of an excellent paper award. Before this July meeting, I was asked to chair a committee to evaluate the possibility of an excellent paper award program for AJ. The associate editor, also volunteered to serve on the committee. Dr. Payne obtained comments from people on the AJ editorial board and also from other professionals not on the AJ. At the AJ editorial board meeting, Dr. Payne presented his comments regarding establishing an award for excellent papers published in the journal. The editorial board agreed not to pursue developing an excellent paper award program for AJ. The main concerns expressed at the meeting regarding establishing such an award were:

1. How should the judging criteria be?
2. How can the judging process be conducted?
3. How should the award be distributed?