CSSA Past History and Future Opportunities

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The Crop Science Society of America was preordained on 31 Dec. 1907 when some 40 agronomists organized the American Society of Agronomy (ASA) to "increase and disseminate knowledge concerning soils and crops and the conditions affecting them." The Proceedings of the American Society of Agronomy, Volume 1, published 26 of the 69 papers presented at the first four meetings under the heading Crops and 13 under the heading Soils. With 102 charter members, ASA was hardly ready to divide.

I doubt that any one of the founding fathers envisioned an ASA with over 10,000 members presenting over 1,200 papers at its 70th Annual Meeting. Had they done so, they might have understood why 56 pages of the Agronomy Journal, over 100,000 words, were required to record the business, reports, etc., of that meeting. Hearing that their ASA and its offspring would spend more than $1,000,000 in its 70th year would have been hard to believe. Knowing its size, they might have been able to understand why their ASA had given birth to two societies, 22 divisions, and innumerable committees. History has shown that the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA) was necessary although some of us did not share that belief at the time it was conceived.

The organization of the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) in 1936 made the ultimate formation of CSSA inevitable. Many soil scientists were engaged in specialized activities and did not consider themselves agronomists. The SSSA gave them a vehicle for participation in the International Soil Science Society. Martin Weiss remembers that, "The Soil Science Society was always in dire financial straits. Many of the oldsters felt that the soil scientists should abandon their splinter groups and pull their full load in the overall society. As a group, the soil scientists were not favorable to such a suggestion."

Herb Kramer, a member of the first ASA Budget and Finance Committee, recalls that their greatest problem was budgeting the appropriate support for SSSA and ASA. Dr. Kramer states that, "At that time the simplest solution would have been to reestablish a single Society, the ASA, consisting of equal divisions or sections. This, of course, was unacceptable and ultimately the SSSA established its own separate Budget and Finance Committee to safeguard its interests. The SSSA committee began to meet with the ASA Committee and contributed to an unbalanced situation weighted toward SSSA. I'm still aghast when I remember the inordinate amount of time the committees spent in attempting to allocate the time of Larry Monthey and everything else in order to achieve a reasonable assignment of costs and income to the two societies' operations."

Roy Blaser was no doubt speaking for others as well as himself when he wrote, "The capable old-time line of plant breeders thought that the Agronomy Journal was their journal and they wished to continue to publish in that journal since they had done so for all of their lives." I suppose I was one of those plant breeders. I was quite happy with the status quo. The Agronomy Journal had published my papers that dealt with soil fertility and physiology as well as plant breeding. When I arrived at Tifton, Ga., in 1936, I was the seventh professional at the Coastal Plain Station. There were no soils specialists, but I soon learned that plant breeding without soil fertility accomplished little in the coastal plain of the South. Fortunately, I had taken minors in soils and plant physiology at Rutgers University and was able to combine these disciplines with plant breeding to solve problems that could not have been solved with any one discipline working alone.

I was among those who believed that many agronomic problems could best be solved by crops and soils specialists working together. We were appalled at the lack of cooperation between crops and soils departments on some university campuses. We saw the organization of separate crops and soils societies as another possible barrier between two groups of agronomists who should be working together. We became greatly concerned when some soil scientists threatened to secede from ASA and have nothing more to do with it.

Iver Johnson reminds us that, "at the same time, there were members in the Crops Division who favored the formation of a new independent society and a journal dealing entirely in genetics, cytology, and plant breeding." George Sprague, Chairman of the Crop Science Division in 1951, remembers the annual Executive Board meeting at Penn State with ASA President Ralph Cummings presiding. "Discussion of the problem of organization was heated and protracted. When we broke for lunch, I think there was a general feeling that we had come to a parting of the ways; there appeared to be no way the soils and crops groups could continue under the