Big Shoes...Little Feet
Taking up the 2013 Presidential Responsibilities

"Be careful of the ‘big-footed agronomist’ syndrome.” That’s the advice one of my advisers gave me in graduate school when I first started my field research in barley as part of my M.S. project. He explained that this happens when the treatments make little difference, but researchers, especially new graduate students, have more influence by stepping on the crop and reducing yield potential. He then looked down at my size 8 1/2 size boots and said “Oh, you’ve got little feet—you’ll do fine,” meaning that at times, we must tread lightly to have the desired impacts and outcomes.

So here I stand, the first woman president of ASA, and I still have little feet…and big shoes to fill. I am following in the footsteps of many famous agronomists who have led this organization from its inception in 1907 to today. Mark A. Carleton, the first ASA president, stated in his presidential address that the organization “…will have, without question, a tremendous influence on agricultural investigation and practices,” although I doubt he could have fully envisioned the diversity of countries, research areas, scientific personnel, consultants, and producers that ASA has had the opportunity to interact with and influence.

At the end of November 2012, ASA collaborated with the Indian Society of Agronomy and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and others to present the Third International Agronomy Congress. The theme of the Congress was “Agriculture Diversification, Climate Change Management, and Livelihoods.” There were more than 1,500 delegates participating in the Congress from India, Canada, Africa, United States, China, and other countries, and it was my privilege to be the ASA representative and honored dignitary at the Congress. I was involved in the inauguration ceremony, delivered two presentations (one during a plenary session and one during the global agronomy session), and participated in the closing valedictory function.

The reception that ASA received at this Congress was phenomenal. Meeting and interacting with the delegates ranking from senior scientists at IRRI, ICARDA, and many other organizations to beginning graduate students was exciting, and the possibilities of new collaborations in numerous research areas are very high for ASA members. After participating in this Congress and other activities as president-elect, such as the national summit on herbicide-resistant weeds in May 2012, I feel humbled and privileged to be the 2013 ASA president and up to the challenge of taking these very little feet and filling some very big shoes. I am looking forward, with your help, to having a productive year. Please contact me at sharon.clay@sdstate.edu if you have comments, suggestions, or questions.

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