SSSA President’s Message

Promoting and Expanding Our Profession

As the Annual Meetings are under way, I am once again left excited about my career choice. I have attended the meetings every year since the mid-1980s and have always felt inspired. As soil scientists, we are involved with a great diversity of subjects, and the Annual Meetings provide a first look at new research from colleagues and spark ideas on directions in research. They also provide insight on how to keep teaching fresh and relevant by highlighting recent advances and providing details on how to apply these new findings and techniques. Beyond the research aspect of the meetings, there is the opportunity to explore and expand collaboration with colleagues both old and new and see how academic ideas can be translated into the practical realm of our growing number of consultants. Agriculture remains a mainstay at the meetings, yet the breadth of topics over the last 30 years has expanded into more disciplines. No real shock as soil science is by its nature a truly interdisciplinary science.

So, if we as soil scientists see ourselves as interdisciplinary, how do others see us? Are others equally impressed by our research? It is our responsibility to spread the word about what it is that we do. We can take a page from the “I am an Agronomist” program launched by Iowa State and promote our science more aggressively to our clientele, providing details on how to apply these new findings and techniques. Beyond the research aspect of the meetings, there is the opportunity to explore and expand collaboration with colleagues both old and new and see how academic ideas can be translated into the practical realm of our growing number of consultants. Agriculture remains a mainstay at the meetings, yet the breadth of topics over the last 30 years has expanded into more disciplines. No real shock as soil science is by its nature a truly interdisciplinary science.

Soils4teachers websites,

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We are on the right track, but with your efforts, we can elevate the soil science profession. Take whatever opportunity you have to publicize soil science: volunteer to talk at career days in schools, with an Envirothon team in your county or state, or public officials from local to federal; in other words, get involved with your community about soil science.

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Further examples of how soil science is being seen as interdisciplinary are the numbers of presentations related to soils at the recent EGU meeting in Vienna, which I reported on earlier this year. Our members are attending several other professional meetings as well—GSA, AGU, ESA, and SWS to name a few. Attending other scientific meetings as a soil scientist, and making it clear that you are a soil scientist when you are there, is one of the best ways to expand our profession by showing other disciplines how soils relate to virtually all of the natural sciences. Several scientific societies now have topical sections, symposium, divisions or groups that focus on soils. Rather than a threat to our autonomy, in my opinion, this is an advantage and opportunity for our profession, and it is part of our strategic plan.

Exposure in other related disciplines provides us, as soil scientists, an opportunity for our discipline to demonstrate what it is that we do so well.

To further cross-society cooperation and engagement, SSSA will have booths at GSA, AGU, ESA, and NSTA conferences in the coming years. These will be places for us to showcase what we offer to the scientific and education community as well as promote the benefits of membership to individuals. Beyond booth space, we have been, as in the case of NSTA, AGU, and GSA, developing, co-sponsoring, or convening workshops and symposium. This is one of the best ways to promote ourselves and our Society.

Finally, let us not forget the role consultants and certification play in the promotion of soil science. Dawn Gibas and Luther Smith have been working diligently to expand licensing. If we are to be viewed as a profession, licensure is a must. We have also been discussing with regulatory agencies the inclusion of professional soil scientist in lists of qualified professionals. The regulatory wheels move slowly, but we have got the ball rolling.

As we finish out this year, we need to take some of that positive energy from the Annual Meetings and self-promote our profession. By our nature, we are multidisciplinary; we are about agriculture; we are about the environment; we are conservationists; we are geoscientists; we are ecologists; we are critical to supporting life on this planet. We are soil scientists, and soils sustain life!