Do you remember last year’s column, when I reminded you of the Legend of Stone Soup? As you may recall, the old folk story tells the tale of hungry strangers who persuade local townspeople to help them make soup so that everyone can eat. Usually told as an illustration about how cooperation ends up helping all concerned—especially when times are hard—the story unfolds as the starving strangers come to town carrying only an empty cauldron. When they ask for contributions of food to make soup, the villagers refuse to give what little they have been able to put aside.

Undaunted, the enterprising strangers fill the pot with water, and after dropping a large stone in the vessel, place it over a fire. Arousing the curiosity of the self-serving villagers, the strangers explain that they are making special secret soup that will take a while to cook. Eventually wanting to be part of the action themselves, the grudging villagers step up one by one first parting with a few carrots, then a couple of potatoes, then a pinch of seasonings until each villager has added just a small contribution. The result is a hearty soup that feeds not only the starving strangers, but the hungry townsfolk as well.

There are modern day illustrations of this folk tale as well. In the movie Fandango, there’s a wedding sequence that uses the Stone Soup theme. Down on their luck, the heroes of the movie need to hold a wedding ceremony and reception but lack the funds to do so. They set up a folding card table by the main street of a sleepy Texas town and invite passersby to come to the wedding. As they relate stories of delinquent caterers and crashed champagne trucks, the friendly townspeople contribute their time and resources, resulting in a glorious wedding ceremony in spite of the circumstances.

If Everyone Gives a Little, We Can Meet our Critical Need for Support

Certainly, circumstances affect all of us, and economic circumstances have probably not changed too much since last year for any of us. You may find yourself once again thinking that the economy has been such a challenge that your own personal budget is just too tight to share. But as Nido Qubein, motivational speaker and president of High Point University, has said, “Your present circumstances don’t determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start.”

As we make our year-end appeal for the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF), we know that it will take each one of us doing what we can to accomplish our goals. As Qubein goes on to say, “Most worthwhile achievements are the result of many little things done in a single direction.” On that basis, I encourage you to think about what your contribution might be. Please remember that no amount is too small. If everyone gives just a little, there will be enough to meet our critical need for support.

A year-end gift to a 501c (3) organization such as ASF is a great way to make a positive difference in the world today and possibly get a break on taxes. ASF will use your contribution to fund student programs, scholarships, lecture-ships, conferences, awards, international travel, and other programs not covered by Society membership dues. You can take pride in the fact that your gift—no matter what size you are able to give—will have a significant impact on the future of agronomy, crop science, and soil science.

One of the funds being highlighted for the 2013 annual appeal is the Kirkham Fund, which is used to support the quadrennial Kirkham conference as well as the Don and Betty Kirkham Soil Physics Award recognizing midcareer soil scientists who have made outstanding contributions in the area of soil physics. Other funds that you may want to consider include the Golden Opportunity Scholars Institute, the Gateway Fund, or the Pathway Fund.

Finally, I want to share one more piece of wisdom from Qubein, who says, “Nothing can add more power to your life than concentrating all your energies on a limited set of targets.” Won’t you consider making one of your targets the volunteer or giving opportunities offered by ASF? Please call (608-273-8095) or email (abarton@sciencesocieties.org) me or visit www.a-s-f.org.