CSSA President’s Message
Positive Changes Are Improving Efficiency, Enhancing Services, and Reducing Costs

CSSA has changed enormously since its founding in 1955 when Gerald O. Mott was the first president and H.H. Kramer was president-elect. Back then, CSSA membership was 1,503 and consisted of six divisions. Today, our membership is more than 5,700 and is organized into nine divisions that represent both the public and private sectors. Many more changes have come about through the actions of an engaged membership and effective leadership. For more than 50 years, change has allowed us to better serve our members. In this month’s column, I would like to review two important changes that have recently occurred in our Society that will have an enormous impact on how we do business. Even though change is not always embraced by all of our members, we must keep in mind that change occurs to better serve our membership and remain relevant.

One of the biggest changes in the recent past involved the transition from paper to digital delivery of publications. This transition has not been easy or universally accepted by our membership. The conversion from paper to digital delivery was carefully considered by your executive committee and board of directors, and the decision was only made after members were polled for their opinion. The conversion was led by Mark Mandelbaum, director of publications, who was hired by headquarters for his expertise in the digital publishing world and an understanding of delivery and formatting of digital media. Starting in 2013, all current and most previous Society publications are available and searchable online to anyone with access to the Digital Library. Prior to the Digital Library, we would typically subscribe to an individual journal, book, or special publication on a cafeteria basis. For example, subscription to one journal was $50 per year in addition to membership. Today, we receive all publications from not just CSSA, but ASA and SSSA as well, for only $89 plus membership.

With the Digital Library, members can download single manuscripts, books, and anything else in the library to your laptop, smartphone, or tablet anywhere in the world as long as you have an internet signal. Additional features, such as creating subject matter folders that you can populate to share with your class, colleagues, or fellow employees are features that were not possible with paper format. Imagine being stranded in an airport with the ability to search for any number of manuscripts or publications from any of the three Societies and save them into a folder that you share with others. Every current issue is at your fingertips faster than it would have been available in print.

Another change that has occurred is the management of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. Prior to the recent formation of ACSESS (Alliance of Crop, Soil, and Environmental Science Societies), most financial operations and physical needs of our Societies were managed by ASA. While this organization functioned well for more than 50 years, it did not provide the independence of operation and flexibility to each of the Societies. ACSESS now manages the finances of the operational and physical needs for the three Societies to function more efficiently to allow each Society to focus on what is most important to their membership. It also allows each Society to be housed in one facility, offer services that provide revenue streams to all three Societies, and pool resources to reduce the cost of operation. ACSESS is an independent entity that provides services needed by all three Societies in an equitable and cost-effective manner.

These changes, which are transparent to most members, improve efficiency, enhance services, and reduce costs, making our membership dues and subscriptions one of the best deals, if not the best, among professional societies.

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Our members are the core of our Society, and CSSA exists only to serve its members. Positive change can only come from within and from members that are engaged, progressive, and willing to serve their Society. A Society is like our body—we need to exercise it to explore and stretch the limits of previous boundaries on a regular basis. When we stretch the boundaries, it may hurt, but it is the only way we can grow and maintain a level of conditioning. Become engaged in your Society and communicate with your division board representative, division chair, or executive committee to ensure your needs are met. Together, we will continue to grow into the 21st century and beyond. Have a wonderful 2013, and as I tell my students, “keep in touch.”

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