In mid-March, the SSSA executives (myself, President-Elect Jan Hopmans, and Past-President Gary Pierzynski) along with the CSSA and ASA executives and several graduate students, science policy committee members, and CCA representatives from across the country attended our annual “Congressional Visits Day.” Along with us were Ellen Bergfeld, Luther Smith, and Emily Fuger from headquarters. The event was facilitated by our science policy staff in DC. The first day, myself, Sharon Clay (ASA President), Mark Brick (CSSA President), Ellen Bergfeld (CEO ACSESS), and Karl Anderson and Karl Glasener (both with our DC Science Policy Office) met with senior staff on both the Senate and House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees. The meetings were brief but substantive. Overall, both individuals were interested in specific case studies to show how research investments from both AFRI (Agriculture and Food Research Initiative) and ARS have led to significant breakthroughs and economic gains, which we were able to provide. Moreover, we made it clear that through our Washington, DC office, we could provide more specifics as requested.

The second day, we met with staff and members of Congress in small groups with a specific goal to promote continued and increased funding for AFRI and for ARS. The small group I was in (myself and Kristin Fisher from the University of Maryland) met with staff members from our respective Senate offices and specific House of Representatives offices. Our meetings ranged from polite listening to enthusiastic discussion, yet overall, the offices were in agreement about the importance of this type of research. As with the meetings with the Appropriations Subcommittee staff, there was a request for specifics on how this research has affected the district or state, which we were able to provide. Furthermore, we once again made it clear to the staff that we could provide more specifics as needed. This is where all our members can play a role.

Every SSSA member can help in this effort. We need to be cognizant that the successes of our funded research need to be promoted not only within our Society, but to the folks that control the funds—specifically Congress. We need to demonstrate how the research and extension activities have helped our states as well as the country as a whole. This must be done in short, easy-to-understand statements or fact sheets that can then be used in subsequent Congressional Visits Days to help promote our science. The participation of our members in promoting our science is critical to our continued success. Making members of Congress aware of the specific impact of our science will expand its credibility and influence on a national level. We must all become advocates for our science because if we don’t, who will?

From l to r: During the Congressional Visits Day in March, SSSA President David Lindbo, graduate student member Kristin Fisher (University of Maryland), and Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) met to discuss funding for AFRI and ARS.