Early Career Members

Introducing Two New Members of the Early Career Members Committee

This month’s column from the Early Career Members Committee (ECMC) introduces two of our newest committee members. The ECMC serves as a voice for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA members who are embarking on their career paths and fosters communication between the early career members and the leadership of the three Societies. Please join the committee in welcoming Marty Schmer, an agronomist with the USDA-ARS in Omaha, NE, and Sudarshan Dutta, who works as the deputy director of the International Plant Nutrition Institute in West Bengal.

—J. McLain, Early Career Members Committee

Marty Schmer

I grew up in the Nebraska Panhandle near the Wyoming border where my extended family farmed and sold farm equipment. Some of my earliest memories were riding in my uncle’s combine or in the grain truck with my dad to deliver beans or sugar beets. Although I worked in my family’s farm equipment business during the summer months, I had not planned on working in the agricultural sector as a career. That changed when I started to work for the USDA-ARS as an undergraduate. I worked under a rangeland scientist who did work on grassland restoration on leafy spurge-infected sites. That research showed a side of agriculture that I had never experienced. I began to understand the critical thinking that was involved in agricultural research and the need to develop research answers before they became mainstream issues. I particularly enjoyed the diversity of problems and topics involved in the research process. I wanted to have a career that was varied, and I found that when I began my graduate studies in agronomy.

My decision to study agronomy and pursue an agricultural research career was solidified as I worked on my graduate degrees. I decided to work as a full-time ARS technician and continue as a part-time graduate student after completing my undergraduate degree. The combined experience I received working as a full-time ARS technician, completing my graduate degrees, and becoming involved in professional societies by attending the Annual Meetings of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA has been extremely valuable. I first joined the Societies when I began my graduate program. Attending my first Annual Meetings was an eye-opening experience, and the opportunity to present, interact with others was invaluable. I spent much of my first meeting attending presentations and interacting with current and future colleagues. I spent time interacting with current and future colleagues while attending the meetings to gauge what pertinent issues are being answered and how my research fits into the larger picture.

Today, I am a research agronomist with the USDA-ARS and I work closely with ARS colleagues and university collaborators to determine how to meet current food, fuel, and feed demands while preserving our natural resources. Public interest in food production and production practices has never been higher, and there continues to be a demand for sustainable agricultural practices in developed countries. I anticipate the talents of early career members will be in high demand for the foreseeable future.

I look forward to serving on the Early Career Member Committee and being able to meet, interact, and develop collaborations with current and future ASA, CSSA, and SSSA scientists.

Sudarshan Dutta

Since the time I was a kid, I used to play with dirt in our backyard. While playing, I sometimes got lost in the world of soil by contemplating the differences in the types of soil. As I grew up, my interest towards soil never went away. I studied soil science as my advance subject during my undergraduate level courses and never looked back, completing my master’s in soil chemistry and earning a Ph.D. in environmental soil science.

Presently, I am working as the deputy director at the International Plant Nutrition Institute (IPNI) for the South Asia program. My research mandates include agricultural research that is focused on food security in the developing world. The major focus includes agronomic management practices that include optimization of yield through proper plant nutrition and sustainable agricultural practices in developing countries. I anticipate the talents of early career members will be in high demand for the foreseeable future.