Most ASA, CSSA, and SSSA members have a strong, if not firsthand, understanding of the agricultural enterprise. Many come from rural backgrounds, have worked with or in extension offices, or have family or friends that have worked on the land. While this may be the norm for the Societies’ members, only about 2% of Americans farm for a living, and less than 17% live in rural areas. That means that the vast majority of our country doesn’t have a real understanding of where their food, clothing, and energy come from. I am actually part of that 98%. I’ve lived in suburban or urban areas my whole life, so I didn’t have a clear grasp of what the “agriculture enterprise” really is. It wasn’t ignorance by choice, but rather a lack of exposure. Well, that “lack of exposure” changed big time for me recently.

In April, I took a two-day, 500+ mile agriculture tour through the Great Plains, traveling from Amarillo, TX to Wichita, KS. My guide was Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) and ASA Science Policy Committee chair Fred Vocasek who was determined to show me as much of the agriculture world as possible. In those two short days, I met with ranchers, farmers, fuel producers, an ag marketing director, water quality experts, agribusinessmen, lab technicians, and the manager of a university experiment station. And I ate a lot of BBQ. To say it was a jam-packed two days would be an understatement.

I had a few goals for the trip. The first was simply to gain exposure to the American agriculture enterprise. Before this trip, my most significant experience in agriculture was a Girl Scout trip I took to a dairy farm when I was 11. The second was to better understanding of the experiences of CCAs, who are employed by a wide variety of industries and face very different challenges. I hoped that this field exposure would help me better communicate this fundamental knowledge from research to the real world. If this knowledge. Effectively communicating this “knowledge pipeline” to congressional offices and the general public is critical if we hope to secure strong funding for food, agriculture, and natural resources research.

During my two days, I learned a lot, much more than I can describe in one article. But here are the three takeaway points that stuck with me:

1. Farmers are highly innovative. I was absolutely blown away by the technology and precision agriculture practices that many farmers, ranchers, and fuel producers employ today. It was great to see how the basic and sometimes theoretical, research conducted at universities is actually applied in the field.

2. Farmers are incredible businessmen and women. During my trip, I met with many different sectors of the agriculture enterprise, and one of the common themes was efficiency.