During the last week of July, the presidents of ASA (Sharon Clay), CSSA (Mark Brick), and SSSA (David Lindbo) traveled to Washington, DC to visit with science and policy agencies to lobby on behalf of our Society membership for continued support for our sciences. We thanked them for their continuing support of agricultural and environmental scientific endeavors and asked how our Societies could help them with lobbying efforts and resources in the planning process. The agencies are already putting together 2015 budgets and plans.

The recommendations made by the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) report on Agricultural Preparedness and the Agriculture Research Enterprise,1 which was rolled out in December 2012, were at the forefront of our conversations with the agencies we visited. We generally discussed where and how the recommendations are being implemented. Overall, the report recommended increasing our U.S. investment in agriculture research by $700 million, including the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), basic research at the National Science Foundation (NSF) related to agriculture, and graduate student and post-doc fellowships.

Bright and early on Monday morning, we visited with the NSF Directorate for Biological Sciences team and discussed the importance of breeding, genomics, climate change, and other stresses in the context of basic sciences and how Society members can interact in the funding arena. Next, the NSF Directorate for Geosciences was visited, and soils, water, and climate change were discussed. At NSF, we visited with the Directorate for Education and Human Resources and discussed challenges in undergraduate, and graduate education and grants for the different venues. We highlighted Opportunities Scholars program and ongoing K-12 education. When we asked NSF personnel how our members could improve their chances on grants, we were given three suggestions: (1) discuss your proposal with the program officer before submission; (2) volunteer to review proposals; and (3) volunteer to be on a panel.

We had lunch with Marcy Gallo, a past ASA, CSSA, and SSSA congressional science fellow in the office of Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, who remained on the Hill and is now the staff director for the House Science Subcommittee on Technology. Marcy is an energetic and knowledgeable asset to the Societies (evidence that our congressional science fellows program is a wise long-term investment). It’s a real plus to have an agricultural scientist who understands the importance of what we do and how we do it. After lunch, we met with Crispin Taylor, executive director, and Alan Jones, president, of the American Society of Plant Biologists to discuss how all of our Societies can work together to increase funding and cooperation. The meeting concluded with a mutual desire to continue discussing common goals in research and education. Monday afternoon ended with discussions with the Gates Foundation and how the BREAD program (Basic Research to Enable Agricultural Development) is moving along. Again, we thanked the Foundation for supporting agricultural research and had a great conversation about how the Societies and the Foundation can work together on their efforts.

Tuesday morning was spent with the director of the Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources at the National Academy of Sciences.