According to a report from the President’s Council of Advisers on Science and Technology, although the United States is the undisputed leader in agricultural production today, as we look out across the 21st century, agriculture faces a series of challenges. Among them is the training of a workforce that will ensure that America maintains its leadership in agriculture around the world.

Now a new program called the Greenfield Scholars may help answer that challenge. The Greenfield Scholars is being offered through the current Golden Opportunity Scholars Institute and provides a focused program for undergraduates with either a two- or four-year degree who go directly into the workforce in an agronomic area. Designed to create a platform for networking and mentorship among new grads who will become practicing agronomy professionals, the Greenfield Scholars program was developed through the joint efforts of Dr. Sharon Clay, immediate past president of ASA, and Amy Asmus, past chair of the International Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) program, who has offered a $5,000 challenge grant to kick start this important program. The duo also credit Luther Smith, Director of Certification Programs for ASA and SSSA, for his help making this initiative a reality.

While there are increasing numbers of agronomy students who go on to get their master’s degrees, many students with two- or four-year degrees will accept a job in industry after graduating and may not have the opportunity for mentorship in their career, continuing education to keep their skills up to date, or networking to be connected with other agronomic professionals.

“We have 300 undergraduates in the Plant Science Department at South Dakota State University. Many want to go back to the farm or be consultants,” says Dr. Clay who is a professor of weed science in the department. “Agronomy needs hands-on people. These new professionals may not need advanced degrees but need to keep current in farming and the best management practices for their area. The Greenfield Scholars will introduce the undergraduates to the CCA program and provide a path to networking and being mentored by professionals in the field.”

The Greenfield Scholars program will provide professional mentorship with a practicing CCA student to the CCA continuing education program. The program is designed to keep professionals informed about the most current research in agronomy and keep professionals up to date on the industry best management practices.

“We won’t hear people saying things like ‘Oh, I learned weed control 20 years ago, and nothing has changed’,” says Dr. Clay. “And even more problematic is the fact that companies in the agricultural industry are often forced to hire new graduates who don’t even have a degree in agriculture. The CCA program also addresses this issue.

The program was originally developed by ASA in 1992 for practicing agronomy professionals in the United States and Canada, and the first certifications were awarded in 1993. The program has helped to train and certify thousands of professionals, some of whom do not necessarily have farm backgrounds. Amy Asmus was one of those professionals, and she is excited about the Greenfield Scholars. Amy is a case study that truly illustrates the need for the program.

Agronomic Science Foundation
Greenfield Scholars: A New Program for Undergrads Going Directly into the Workforce

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doi:10.2134/csa2014-59-1-14