cate, work as part of a team, and solve problems. Our industry mentor often reminds us of the importance of “soft skills” in career development; the most hirable and successful people are those with skills and leadership ability that go beyond their research training.

The realized benefits of this public–private interaction, however, are not one-sided. Both graduate students and industry participants benefit from the cooperative and dynamic relationship. The industry sponsors publicly demonstrate their support of local university programs, network with future employees, and, more importantly, share ideas in a public forum.

Over the past 10 years, the Applied Plant Sciences graduate program at the University of Minnesota has seen more than 50% of its graduates enter into industry-related positions. This statistic is commonplace in plant science programs across the nation, and it certainly highlights the robust relationship between public and private sectors. Multiple cohorts of students have now planned and participated in this annual symposium, and many of the previous planning committee members have graduated and entered into an industry career. This ongoing collaboration has led to both idea generation and positive networking for graduate students across the nation.

Replicating the Success at Other Universities

Since the inaugural symposium, DuPont Pioneer has replicated its framework at 16 other universities, spanning five continents and seven countries. The expansion of this network is expected to continue in the years to come. During the first half of 2014, the network of symposia has engaged more than 1,200 in-person attendees and more than 350 online viewers. Over the last seven years, these annual events have reached more than 6,000 people.

Other prominent industry sponsors have begun to take note of these realized benefits. At the University of Minnesota, symposia based on the public–private collaborative model have been initiated, including the Production Agriculture Symposium sponsored by Monsanto, the multi-organizational Student Organic Seed Symposium, and the Borlaug Memorial Lecture sponsored by Syngenta. These symposia represent opportunities for graduate students to explore industry-related positions and network within their respective disciplines.

The 8th Annual Plant Breeding Symposium at the University of Minnesota will be held on 27 Mar. 2015. As we begin the planning process, we find it is important to continue to define the public–private relationship, particularly with regard to the graduate student and private-sector interaction. The two sectors are interdependent, and both benefit tremendously from the relationship. The established framework of student-driven symposia serves an essential component of graduate student education by providing a professional development experience in addition to enhancing strong scientific skills. Connectivity between industry and the public sector, as well as networking among global scientists, is invaluable to the continued success of the plant sciences.

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