SSSA President's Message

A Retrospective of this Year as SSSA President

As I started my year as your president, my action plan was to help grow and diversify our membership, and to do so with our headquarters’ strengths and your efforts, in further building the Soil Science Society of America to be among the leading science organizations and the go-to place for expertise and resources on soils. Many times I have spoken about this window of opportunity that has presented itself as the general public is increasingly concerned about the future sustainability of a world that can sustain itself by providing the food, feed, fiber, and fuel for its growing population, while securing our natural ecosystems and reducing the environmental footprints of our activities in the midst of a changing climate. The agricultural intensification solution of increasing production without expanding land dedicated to food production can only occur if soils become more productive and more efficient at using inputs of nutrients, water, and energy.

I have made the case previously that soil science will have to be a key component if we want to achieve these goals by being ready to partner and collaborate with our colleagues in related disciplines and by being increasingly engaged with the public and policymakers. Many of these elements were included in our recent strategic plan and are a continuation of priorities developed by past leadership. My own goals aligned with the ongoing activities of both building internal capacity within the Society and expanding external relationships outside our soils profession.

Progress Made this Year

Let me review the most important progress made to date and conclude with future opportunities and challenges. Much discussion in 2014 has been on developing a membership dues structure with the goal of increasing and diversifying our membership as well as cultivating our own identity in the earth and environmental sciences community; and to do so while maintaining our strong partnerships with ASA and CSSA. We have agreed to go ahead with simplifying the new member application process and providing easy access to electronic information through our SSSA News Flash. No final decision on our SSSA News Flash. No final decision on student voting member dues has been made, in part because of unknown budgetary implications and the need to further explore options with our sister Societies.

This year, we agreed to add a graduate student voting member. As the Society is growing and much of that growth comes from graduate students, we seek to include student members and have them be part of the Society and the decision-making process. Planning for a sustainable future, we agreed to revisit our Grand Challenges. The Science Policy Office is sending out a member survey, asking you all to identify areas as well as soliciting your input on industry soils-related research funding. I ask that you take the time to complete this survey as this information will be crucial in our communications with federal research agencies and to complete this survey as this information will be crucial in our communications with federal research agencies and to develop our soil science advocacy statements.

Many efforts this year have been on expanding professional relationships with related science societies in the U.S. as well as internationally. We have entered a memorandum of understanding (MOUs) with AGU and this has led to new initiatives of joint supporting of workshops and joint sessions at professional meetings. This past year, we organized two successful topical conferences, one on “Innovation in Soil-Based Onsite Wastewater Treatment” and another on “Soil’s Role in Restoring Ecosystem Services” that we cosponsored with other organizations, such as ESA. In planning more focused conferences like these, including a conference this May on “Global Soil Security”.

With our staff, we traveled to meetings of GSA, ESA, and Digital Library information; and reaching out through our “I Heart Soil” stickers, of which we now have printed some 200,000 copies in 12 different languages. Through our material, available on our website, for both K-12 as well as teachers, consultants, and legislative staffers to check us out by providing easy access to electronic information through our SSSA News Flash. No final decision on student voting member dues has been made, in part because of unknown budgetary implications and the need to further explore options with our sister Societies.

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