Science Policy News

2014: Science Policy Year in Review

It’s that time of year when many people reflect on the events of the past year while also looking ahead to the future. As we in the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Science Policy Office look back, we are encouraged by what we see and excited for new opportunities in 2015. Here we present to you the 2014 science policy year in review!

2014 farm bill: The year kicked off with the passage of the 2014 farm bill. Not only did the bill provide funding for several expired research programs, it also established the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research. The new Foundation has $200 million in start-up funding that must be matched by private partners—potentially raising an additional $400 million for food and agriculture research. Over the summer, the chairman and board were selected and are working to get the Foundation up and running.

Coalition partnerships: To maximize the efforts of the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Science Policy Office, we are members of several strong coalitions that work to support food, agriculture, and natural resources research. The AFRI Coalition, the Climate Science Working Group, the Coalition for National Science Funding, and the Geopolicy Working Group are just a few of the organizations that we partner with. Bringing diverse voices to Congress in support of research strengthens our message tremendously. These coalitions also provide us with new opportunities and audiences to talk about our sciences—giving our members the opportunity to participate in events such as the American Geophysical Union’s “Science Policy Conference” and the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation’s “Congress on Adapting Food Production to a Changing Climate”.

Congressional Visits Day: Our annual Congressional Visits Day (CVD) event was the largest to date, with 55 participants including 24 students and 10 Certified Crop Advisers. Our group met with nearly 100 congressional offices asking for support for the food, agriculture, and natural resources research programs at USDA. The relationships established during CVD are a critical part of our grassroots advocacy effort, and we are thrilled to see it growing with such success.

Congressional Science Fellowship: Since 1986, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA have sponsored a Society member to work as a special assistant in a congressional office through the Congressional Science Fellowship. The 2014 fellow, Jennifer Burks, recently accepted a permanent position in the office of Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) working on agricultural and environmental issues. The 2015 Fellow, Cynthia Hsu, is currently working for the House Science Committee. It is a great opportunity to have strong science ambassadors working closely with lawmakers.

Congressional Soils Caucus: In July, the Congressional Soils Caucus co-hosted the “Soils, Vines, and Wines” congressional briefing. The briefing was an overwhelming success with more than 300 attendees. Educational briefings are an excellent way to expose members of Congress and their staff to our sciences. Since 2015 is the International Year of Soils, we plan to work with the Congressional Soils Caucus to host a series of congressional briefings around different IYS themes that will continue to raise awareness for the importance of soil science.

Fiscal year 2015 appropriations: Federal programs that fund food, agriculture, and natural resources research did fairly well in the fiscal year (FY) 2015 appropriations process, with USDA, NSF, and DOE Office of Science receiving small funding increases. With...