Although December is not typically the time to think of planting, growing, and reaping—especially in the Northern Hemisphere—we have an opportunity to sow seeds this month, which promise to produce a great harvest to benefit future generations.

Those seeds are the individual decisions about year-end giving that each of us will ponder as 2014 draws to a close. Whether your gift is large or small, please consider the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF) and its annual appeal, which benefits many important initiatives, including scholarships, travel grants, lectureships, and more.

As you might know, the International Year of Soils begins next month, and ASF is recognizing the urgent need to raise awareness and promote sustainability of the limited soil resources that blanket our planet. The Global Soil Partnership (GSP) at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has declared 2015 the International Year of the Soils.

Soil is a finite natural resource and is non-renewable on a human timescale. It is known that soils are the foundation for food and animal feed, fuel and natural fiber production, the supply of clean water, nutrient cycling, and a range of ecosystem functions. The area of fertile soils covering the world’s surface is limited and increasingly subject to degradation, poor management, and loss to urbanization. We must increase awareness of the life-supporting functions of soil if this trend is to be reversed. And a reversal of this trend is absolutely necessary to enable the levels of food production that will be required to meet the demands of increased population levels predicted by the year 2050.

Funding the ‘Brown Revolution’

Dr. David Lindbo, SSSA past president and professor in the Department of Soil Science at North Carolina State University, says “Soil is critical, but we tend to treat it like dirt. We don’t really appreciate all the things it gives us.”

According to Dr. Lindbo, during the 1970s, the push was for clean water and clean air. “And we did that well, but soil was taken for granted because we thought it would never go away.”

Echoing Franklin Delano Roosevelt, when he said, “The civilization that destroys its soil, destroys itself,” Dr. Lindbo pointed out that the prosperity of a nation really depends on soil. According to Dr. Lindbo, the Green Revolution focused on crops and developing them to produce greater yield, adding that the Brown Revolution will focus on soil because we cannot afford to wait for a crisis to emerge to address the issues that face us around this non-renewable resource. ASF, in cooperation with SSSA, is seeking to raise $185,000 to support this effort.

Keep Dig It! Traveling

And although you have read about Dig It! in this column many times before, allow me to remind you again about this exhibit, which is traveling the country to educate people about the complex world of soil.

Realizing the resource for the next generation would be found among students in grades K-12, Dr. John Havlin, ASF chair and professor in the Department of Soil Science at North Carolina State University, was instrumental in inspiring this innovative educational tool by communicating his passion to key players such as the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Nutrients for Life Foundation, and the USDA who all played a big role in making this dream a reality.

After its initial 18-month run at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, Dig It! appeared at the Durham Museum in Omaha, NE; the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture in Spokane, WA; and the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. It is currently displayed at The California Museum in Sacramento and will be there well into 2015. The funds we raise through this year’s annual appeal will help to keep the interactive displays, hands-on models, videos, and 54 soil monoliths representing soils from each U.S. state, territory, and the District of Columbia in the public eye. According to Dr. Havlin, the SSSA is looking to raise $100,000 to bring Dig It! to the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh, NC, with plans for future stops in New Mexico and St. Louis. “From there, we hope to find a permanent home at The Field Museum in Chicago,” Dr. Havlin says.