I’ve written before about the power of grassroots advocacy and the impact that a personal connection with congressional offices can have. While the Science Policy Office provides opportunities for Society members to engage with their congressional delegation throughout the year, our largest advocacy event is the annual Congressional Visits Day (CVD). Every spring, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA bring Society members to Washington, DC to meet with their members of Congress and advocate for food, agriculture, and natural resources research.

On 25 March, 55 members of Society leadership, graduate students, and Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs) participated in the largest CVD to date, meeting with 87 congressional offices. In their meetings, participants emphasized the importance of USDA research programs, specifically the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). CVD attendees discussed their own research and described how it could benefit not only their state, but also the agriculture and natural resources community at large.

CVD provides Society members with the unique opportunity to meet with their members of Congress face to face and learn firsthand how policies are developed. Many participants hoped to increase their knowledge of the budget and legislative processes that have such a significant impact on the research landscape, to get an idea of how things work in Washington,” says Georgia graduate student Clint Steketee. “As a graduate student, it’s important for me to understand the process and what it means for research.”

This year, graduate and CCA participation nearly doubled, with 24 student and 10 CCA attendees. Small teams consisting of a Society leader, a student, and a CCA illustrated the “research pipeline,” where knowledge is developed through basic research and then brought to producers by the CCAs.

This pipeline of information was an important part of CVD, especially for congressional staff who often don’t have such detailed knowledge on the research landscape.