A post-doctoral experience is often regarded as a prerequisite for employment as a university professor. While post-doctoral training is part of the traditional career pathway in academia, there are many good reasons for a recent Ph.D. graduate to consider a “post-doc” regardless of if they eventually land in academia, industry, government, or elsewhere. For some, post-doctoral training may be the opportunity to write grant proposals, conduct original research, and publish in prestigious journals. For others, it may be a time to explore new areas of research that are not directly related to their field of graduate training.

In addition to refining technical skills, a post-doctoral experience is an additional avenue to improve “soft skills” (e.g., communication, leadership, teamwork, and project management) that are essential for landing a dream position in today’s job market. From my personal experience, a brief post-doctoral position was an excellent opportunity to continue building projects and talents that I had acquired during graduate school while also improving communication and people management skills that will help me excel in my current and future career. While the main focus of my post-doctoral experience was on conducting field research and supervising a laboratory at the University of Illinois, I also had the opportunities to teach a graduate-level class in crop growth and development and present research results to audiences including farmers, industry professionals, and academic colleagues in South Dakota, Nebraska, Illinois, and at the 2012 ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting in Cincinnati, OH. I may not have had the opportunity to experience some of these activities had I transitioned immediately from my Ph.D. education into a full-time position in industry or academia. Career development paths are different for everyone, but for some, a post-doctoral experience may be just the right step for continued personal and professional enrichment!

Why Should You Consider a Post-doctoral Experience?

The completion of several long years of graduate studies is in sight. What do you do next? Should you continue your training with a post-doctoral experience? The answers to these questions depend on your personal and professional aspirations. Whether it is like a cliché, but where do you see yourself in 5, 10, and 30 years? Changes in direction will certainly occur throughout your career, but having a vision of where you want to go can help with making career choices that help you get there. Graduate school is a time for specialized education, original research, and learning to be an outstanding scientist, but it often leaves little time for other forms of training which may be necessary to excel in the professional world. A post-doctoral experience can focus on these additional training needs, whether it is continued research and publication, supervising a laboratory and its staff, extension and outreach, or teaching, just to cite a few.

How Do You Find Post-doctoral Opportunities?

While a position may be waiting for you at the program where you completed your Ph.D., there are opportunities within the same department, other institutions. Opportunities may occur domestically or internationally, and there are many ways to find a post-doctoral position within plant, soil, and environmental sciences:

- **Academia.** Many academic departments offer post-doctoral positions periodically. They are usually advertised on departmental websites, university human resource pages, and in the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Career Center (www.careerplacement.org). In addition, many related professional organizations such as the...