Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

Two years ago, I prepared a statement of my vision for leadership of ASA, and you, the members, did me the great honor of electing me into the presidential ranks. As I launch into my year as your president, I continue to see many of the same challenges and opportunities. So, as I begin this year, I would like to share once more my vision for the Society:

Challenges to the science and practice of agronomy have never been greater, as articulated in ASA’s Grand Challenge to ‘double global food, feed, fiber, and fuel production on existing farmland within the 21st century with production systems that enable food security; use resources more efficiently; enhance soil, water, and air quality, biodiversity, and ecosystem health; and are economically viable and socially responsible.’ ASA is well positioned to support members to each make unique contributions to address this grand challenge, be it through science, education, practice, policy, or advocacy. The Community structure has brought vitality to our programming that offers avenues for engaging growing numbers of early career and practicing agronomists while retaining the strengths and leadership of longer term members. Our ACSESS Digital Library promises to attract the best science and make our science more accessible worldwide. Many challenges remain. Federal funding for agricultural science continues to decline and the U.S. is lagging globally in agricultural research funding. Our policy office has built credibility with key partners to provide a unified voice in Washington and avenues for members to make their voices heard as we strive to raise the visibility of agricultural research within the broader U.S. research policy debates. We must develop better “branding” for agronomy outside our community, so that young students and families become aware of this vital discipline and the rewarding career opportunities it can offer. ASA has an exciting future ahead in maintaining the capacity of agronomists and articulating the role of science and technology in meeting today’s agricultural production needs while maintaining and developing options for the future that will be resilient under variable and shifting climate, market, and policy conditions. It would be an honor to represent the members of ASA and work with the Society leadership to address these challenges and embrace the opportunities ahead of us.”

Since I wrote the paragraph above, I have had the opportunity to meet and work with the board and leadership of the three Societies and our fantastic staff. In a few weeks, I will be meeting with Carolyn Olson, Roch Gaussoin, Ellen Bergfeld, and other senior staff to set specific goals and priorities for the year. I am excited to work with our committees, communities, and all of the members and partners to realize the opportunities ahead of us.

doi:10.2134/csa2015-60-1-8

International Year of Soils

in August when the theme is Soils Support Health, lessons will focus on food quality and health, including the role soil plays in the development of anti-microbials, medical science, and health and beauty products that come from the soil. Environmental concerns will take the stage in September, when the theme Soils Protect the Natural Environment and lessons revolve around soil conservation, erosion/dust/historic disasters as well as wetlands, watershed, and nutrient legacies.

In October when the theme is Soils and the Products We Use, students will learn how food gets from the farm to the table as well as all about products that are used in building homes and other products we consume and how they come from the soil. The November theme—Soils and Climate—will put a spotlight on the role of soil in carbon sequestration, mitigation, and the release of greenhouse gases as well as desertification and drought issues. As the year comes to an end, the theme in December—Soils, Culture, and People—will focus on the role of soil in art, religious and spiritual connections, forensics, and how soil has influenced civilization throughout history.

These exciting opportunities help us communicate the importance of soil and all the ways it affects our daily lives because students will become the leaders of our next generation of soil scientists and agronomy professionals. To support the celebration of the 2015 International Year of Soils and the many educational and outreach activities we have planned, we are seeking sponsorships from individuals and organizations. To learn more about the various ways to show your support for the International Year of Soils or to explore other volunteer or giving opportunities offered by the Agromic Science Foundation, call me at 608-273-8095 or email me at abarton@sciencesocieties.org.