Greetings! I look forward to serving as the CSSA president over the next year. In that role, I hope to have an extensive opportunity to complete and plan meaningful work with members in CSSA, as well as SSSA and ASA.

Structurally, the three Societies have an executive board, with equal representation from all three Societies. Members should and must feel comfortable bringing issues, comments, concerns and even the occasional high-five to division and community chairs, as well as the executive board. We are an elected body, given the awesome opportunity to act on members’ behalf for issues and challenges facing a diverse assortment of disciplines.

The perception at 20,000 ft (division and/or community level) is sometimes thought as being less “big picture” than the perceived view at 60,000 ft (Society level), but commonalties and corresponding challenges should not be overlooked. Global climate change, food security, and science and agricultural literacy are just a few that come to mind. The interesting thread across all three, I suggest, is the idea that success and relevance in our chosen field(s) is less “selling” an idea to a journal reviewer, granting agency, Extension client, or agricultural consumer and more “selling” and “marketing” what we do to the public at large.

We can debate the success of current and past efforts in educating the public about science, but if a recent conversation with a close friend during a social gathering is any indication, we have a long way to go. I had been given samples of a soybean oil-based lip balm provided by one of our faculty. I offered her one, and the first words out of her mouth were “it isn’t GMO, is it?” This individual is an intelligent, educated, well-read, retired professional. The lack of understanding isn’t always centered on a hot-button subject like biotechnology. A successful organic grower shared a conversation he had with a potential customer. The “customer” was reluctant to buy pumpkins that had been grown in soil amended with chicken manure unless the grower could assure him that the manure did not contain mad cow disease. Unfortunately, responses like these appear to be the rule rather than the exception.

We Cannot Rely on the ‘Think System’

Professor Harry Hill, in the classic musical The Music Man, tells the children to learn to play via the “Think System” in which they simply have to think of a tune over and over and will know how to play it without ever touching their instruments. Thinking the public will use the “Think System” to figure out where their food comes from is equally senseless. Relying on media outlets and less-than-reliable testimonials is similarly problematic. The responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of members of scientific societies.

Should CSSA members be involved? The easy answer is yes. Should we corroborate with other science- and research-based societies such as our siblings in ASA and SSSA and AAAS? Most definitely. Will increasing science literacy solve the great challenge of feeding 9 billion people? While not directly, it could be a critical cog in moving the wheels of funding agencies and policies. If we turn back to the initial sentences of this meandering message, I indicated that we must be involved in highly competitive selling and marketing to be successful in our chosen endeavors. How increases in science literacy among the consumer public might be attempted is discussion for a future message. Stay tuned.

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New Corporate Member

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA welcome the following new corporate member as of 1 Dec. 2014:

FarmLink, Glidden, IA, Platinum level

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Corporate Membership is an effective component in your company’s outreach to agronomic, crop, soil, and environmental science professionals and students. Corporate membership enables your company to interact with the Societies in ways that best fit your needs. All levels of membership provide access to journal, meeting, membership, and recognition benefits, as well as special reduced rates for company-wide Digital Library subscriptions. And a Corporate Membership supports the missions of the Societies and the development of students in our professions.

Interested in Corporate Membership? Visit crops.org/membership/corporate for more information, or contact Eric Welsh at ewelsh@sciencesocieties.org or 608-273-8081.

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