Graduate students are at a unique point in their scientific career. While you are gaining tremendous scientific knowledge and experience, many of you have not yet decided where that knowledge will take you. It’s an exciting and sometimes uncertain time, but it also represents great opportunity.

Graduate student members represent a key component of our advocacy effort. They are the future, not only of our Societies, but of the entire food, agriculture, and natural resources enterprise. This position in your career is filled with potential and by engaging with our graduate student members early in their career, we hope to build a strong network of future science advocates.

The Science Policy Office offers several advocacy opportunities that are specifically tailored to graduate students. Two of our largest awards are accepting applications right now: the Congressional Science Fellowship and the Future Leaders in Science award.

Applications for the 2016 Congressional Science Fellowship and the 2015 Future Leaders in Science award are both open through 15 January.

The ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Congressional Science Fellowship program allows a Society member to spend a year working in Washington, DC as a special assistant for a member of Congress or congressional committee. The Fellowship is truly a unique opportunity to use your scientific knowledge to help shape federal policy. Many Fellows have continued working in policy, like the 2014 Fellow, Jennifer Burks, who accepted a permanent position in the office of Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI). Others returned to research and academia, but with valuable new skills and contacts gained during their time in DC.

The annual ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Congressional Visits Day (CVD) program is another opportunity for graduate student members who would like to engage in advocacy. Each spring, we bring Society members to Washington, DC to meet with their members of Congress and ask for support of food, agriculture, and natural resources research. One way graduate student members can participate in CVD is through the Future Leaders in Science award. Award recipients receive special advocacy training and have their expenses covered when traveling to DC for CVD. They also have the opportunity for one-on-one interaction with the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA leadership, expanding their future research, advocacy, and career development network.

Our CVD alumni are an invaluable part of our advocacy effort. We rely on them to foster the relationships they began during CVD in order to develop new champions in Congress for research. CVD alumni have gone on to host local meetings with their members of Congress, sharing the local impact of their research. They also share their experiences with colleagues, at their home universities and at the ASA, CSSA and SSSA Annual Meeting. Showing other graduate students that engaging with policy-makers on scientific issues is not only possible but makes a difference helps broaden our impact and grow our advocacy network.

But don’t think that the only way you can be involved in science advocacy is by coming to DC. We also periodically send out electronic “action alerts” asking you to reach out to you members of Congress on a specific issue. Every email, call, or letter that a congressional office receives is documented, and if an office received dozens of notices about the same issue, you can bet they will notice. Taking part in larger advocacy efforts organized by the Societies is a great way to multiply our impact.

Applications for the 2016 Congressional Science Fellowship and the 2015 Future Leaders in Science award are both open through 15 January. To find out about these and other advocacy opportunities or to apply, visit www.agronomy.org/science-policy/get-involved. Science advocacy is a powerful force, and we need you to help harness it!

From l to r: 2014 Future Leaders in Science award winner Mary Tiedeman, along with Rep. Steve King (R-IA), former ICCA chair Amy Asmus, and CCA Anna Balvance.