Last December, President Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro announced normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. At a flag-raising ceremony in mid-August 2015, the U.S. Embassy in Havana was re-opened after closing in 1961 when the Eisenhower administration severed diplomatic ties with the government of then 34-year-old Fidel Castro. From 1961 until 1977, the U.S. Embassy was protected by the Swiss but remained unused. During the Carter administration, the Embassy reopened as an Interests Section, staffed with 51 U.S. diplomats but was officially part of the Swiss mission to Havana.

Meanwhile, because of the normalization of diplomatic relations, the ASA and CSSA Boards of Directors discussed opportunities for our Societies to engage in Cuba last spring. Wes Meixelsperger, CFO of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, and Ellen Bergfeld, CEO of the Societies, joined the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)-sponsored executive HR delegation to Cuba in October to investigate how we might best organize meetings of interest and value to our members as well as the people of Cuba.

Our intensive five-day itinerary was organized by To Cuba Now, an authorized and licensed educational exchange provider. Our itinerary included meetings with the past president of the Cuban Soil Science Society and SSSA member, Dr. C. Olegario Pablo Muniz Ugarte, and Professor Sergio Jorge Pastrana, Foreign Secretary and Executive Director of the Cuban Academy of Sciences, as well as legal experts on employment and foreign investment law, HR practitioners from government and private-sector firms, representatives of foreign companies operating in Cuba, a University of Havana expert on U.S.–Cuba bilateral and economic relations, an architect working on urban planning and restoration of Old Havana, and U.S. Embassy staff.

Following is what we learned about business operations, agriculture, and opportunities to plan meetings in Cuba:

**Scientific Exchange**

Enhanced scientific exchange/collaboration are on the horizon and are already happening with our members. We are planning an exploratory meeting with the leadership of the three Societies, Cuban researchers, and farmers during the coming spring (2016). The resulting discussions will lead to opportunities of more collaborative substance available to our members. Conversations occurred with a few U.S. universities, notably Auburn. In case you missed it, take a look at Professor Pastrana’s 15 May editorial in *Science* regarding opportunities for expanded collaboration and scientific exchange: http://bit.ly/1Mo5w5g. Meanwhile, the Cuban Academy of Sciences has a long history and has enjoyed robust financial support, even during harsh economic times. The focus has been to train as many Cubans as possible and to transmit the “advice of those who know to the ear of those in charge.” Pretty noble stuff. Areas of high interest include biotechnology, biodiversity, water, soil, ecosystems, and natural resources.

**Food Availability**

Cuba remains a net importer of food, and food availability is often limited. Some reports estimate the percentage of imported food as high as 60%. Last year (2014), according to the Census Bureau, the U.S.