As we start a new year, I am very excited at the prospects for ASA. There are many opportunities and great needs for the work that we do to address the Grand Challenge that we have set for ourselves 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.

Since the Society embraced that grand challenge, global population trajectories are exceeding prior projections (Gerland et al., 2014), and now we must prepare for populations between 9.8 and 10.3 billion people by 2100. Most of the population growth will occur in some of the poorest and least food-secure regions of the world. Additionally, at the 2014 annual awards breakfast in Long Beach, we heard from Barbara Burlingame about the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) programs for sustainable diets (Burlingame and Dernini, 2012), which take a holistic approach to addressing dietary patterns that are unsustain-able. The FAO definition of sustainable diets includes agricultural systems with “…low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations…”. Dr. Burlingame addressed both malnutrition and obesity, micronutrient deficiencies that result in stunting and developmental disruption, and loss of biodiversity within our crop species as well as within our landscapes.

Moving forward, the Society needs to help create a space for a new dialog about agricultural sustainability that bridges divides across all of the types of production and agricultural systems to find common ground. In today’s political environment of limited resources, it will be increasingly important to develop a unified message for support of agricultural research and education.

To address the complexities and challenges in the agricultural and food systems, we will need to continue to broaden our partnerships to include horticulture, animal and meat sciences, dairy and poultry sciences, ecologists, and others on the production side as well as human nutritionists, rural sociologists, agricultural economists, and others on the food security side. Gaining the support of consumers will be essential to gaining the support of the policy makers, so efforts to communicate about the science and practice of agronomy will be increasingly important.

We need the efforts of all of our members to tackle these challenges. I hope each of you will find ways to engage through our communities, committees, workshops, online seminars, publications, and meetings to bring your skills and ideas to the table. Working with the board and our excellent staff, I will dedicate my efforts to moving us forward toward our strategic goals to address the Grand Challenges facing agriculture today.

References
