This month, you’ll hear from the CSSA Science Policy Committee past-chair, Stephen Baenziger, and the committee’s new chair, Richard Pratt, on the role of the CSSA Science Policy Committee and the activities it is involved in.

While most of you are familiar with the topic-based committees of the Societies, you may not know that each Society also has a Science Policy Committee. It’s the Science Policy Committees that act as scientific advisers on all policy and advocacy matters. These committees play an important role working on key policy issues that affect you.

Established in 2010, the CSSA Science Policy Committee is comprised of three members of the CSSA Board of Directors, the past president of CSSA and at least three additional volunteer members who serve as policy and scientific experts. The Science Policy Committee works closely with the CSSA board of directors, providing them with recommendations on policy issues, while the Board provides critical feedback and ultimate approval of all policy positions. Working together, our two committees help determine what issues we engage in and what positions CSSA takes.

The Science Policy Office is an invaluable resource in directing the ongoing advocacy activities of the Societies. We rely on their policy expertise and relationships with Congress, agency officials, and other scientific partners. While we provide scientific expertise and first-hand knowledge of the field and the lab, the Science Policy Office helps shape that knowledge and experience into a powerful advocacy force that garners support for our sciences. One clear example of the impact of our advocacy efforts can be seen in the steady funding increases USDA’s Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) program has received over the past several years.

In previous years, the CSSA Science Policy Committee developed position papers on several topics including crop germplasm, climate change, and biosecurity. In 2014, we released a statement that supported biotechnology and genetically engineered (GE) crops and opposed the labeling of foods that contain GE crops. We also supported efforts for the logical regulation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and provided input to the National Academy of Sciences’ assessment report on the AFRI program. In addition, we have been called on to provide nominees for congressional meetings or briefings, advisory committees, and programs sponsored by other scientific organizations.

This year, the Committee also began working on a major updating of the CSSA Grand Challenges. The Grand Challenges help show policy-makers and the public the importance of crop science. This is a living document that will change as our scientific and societal needs evolve. Look for the release of our updated grand challenges in early 2015.

For CSSA members who believe in the quote from Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you want to see in the world,” this is the committee that can help develop the future that you want. As past and current committee members, we have enjoyed representing our diverse and dynamic membership and helping ensure our Society plays a vital role in creating a better world. We are proud to represent the Society and our sciences through serving on the Science Policy Committee and would encourage all members to reach out to the Science Policy Office to learn ways you too can engage in advocacy.

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Fang, Q.X., L.R. Ahuja, A.A. Andales, and J.D. Derner. 2014. Using a model and forecasted weather to predict forage and livestock production for making stocking decisions in the coming growing season. p. 161–181.


Lascano, R.J., and J.R. Nelson. 2014. Circular planting to enhance rainfall capture in dryland cropping systems at a landscape scale: measurement and simulation. p. 85–111.