Yet again, well intended New Year’s resolutions bite the dust! I had planned to be diligent and submit a column every month. I am currently batting 0.333 and trying to improve my average with this column.

In my January column, I mentioned the need for better efforts in science literacy. A recent media explosion of the FooDS (Food Demand Survey) effort in the Agricultural Economics Department at Oklahoma State University (OSU) confirms my suspicions. A survey indicated that “83.46% of respondents stated that they support mandatory labels on foods that would indicate the presence or absence of DNA.” No that’s not a typo, and yes, the survey methods are robust and valid. The public’s misconceptions concerning the food they eat, the grass they play on, and unnecessary fear of genetic technology(s) is not going away, and in my opinion, is getting worse. The more I explore the concept of science literacy (or lack thereof), the more concerned I become.

It is very convenient to blame the media and go on about our diverse occupations, and yet, if the problem is science literacy, shouldn’t the scientist bear some, if not all, of the responsibility? Perhaps. You can Google the term “science literacy” and receive an overabundance (over 14 million as I write this column) of “hits.” Click on several and you’ll find evidence of sincere and honest efforts to improve the understanding of science; commentary indicating the need for more efforts in science literacy; and signals, such as the FooDS effort at OSU, indicating we have a long way to go.

As an individual, with some degree of scientific education, what can or should you consider doing? We need to be science evangelizers. Evangelize is defined as “to try to convert an individual or group to a different religion.” For our purposes, as simplistic as it sounds, let’s delete religion and substitute “logical way of thinking” and you will capture the essence of what might be done. Feel free to substitute “logical” with “scientifically valid” or “research based”; however, I find “logical” to be less intimidating. Plus, it seems appropriate given the recent passing of Spock (RIP, Leonard Nimoy).

I am certainly not suggesting a door to door sales pitch—the avenue many evangelization efforts take—rather, a slight modification of the “elevator pitch.” An elevator pitch, elevator speech, or elevator statement is a short summary used to quickly and simply define a profession, product, service, organization, or event and its value proposition. Pre-preparation is critical, and once developed, use your pitch when grocery shopping, eating out (buffets, if you are so inclined, are a great opportunity), or watching your children’s soccer game or another sporting event played on real grass. Describe in laymen’s terms the origin of the food or the extensive breeding effort used to develop the safe playing surface being used. The opportunities are endless. You’ll want to avoid the appearance of stalking (do not be obnoxious) but having a card with your website or anything that will give them the opportunity to explore further is a nice touch.

Now let’s get back to work. We have lots to do.....