I would like to comment on an article published in the
March 2015 issue of CSA News magazine, “Back to
Basics: Breeding Plants for Organic Agriculture.”1 I have
practiced agronomy as a crop ecologist since 1956, cooperat-
ing with colleagues in allied fields, and I have conducted
studies to develop rational and efficient management for
grasslands and livestock. The results from these experi-
ments could be applied by producers willing to learn and
use them. I have also been a teacher to students, producers,
and other teachers, using language skills that enabled me
to converse directly with farmers and others in numerous
countries and cultures using words they understand.

Thus, I understand and endorse the concept that lan-
guage used by scientists to each other as well as to non-sci-
entists should be precise and accurate, even if that language
is not used often in common speech. This is particularly sig-
nificant in a magazine like CSA News, published by scientif-
ic societies (ASA, CSSA, and SSSA) with the avowed aim of
communicating correct information to a general audience.
Up-to-date information and accurate language should be
used to disseminate correct, verifiable informa-
tion. It is the duty of scientists to explain the
need to substitute for vernacular communications.

An example is the use of the word “variety,”
is a botanical term long used to denote a subcategory of
plants within a species. In contrast, “cultivar” describes an
agricultural or horticultural plant with specifi-
cal characteristics developed or selected by humanity.

The fact that “variety” has been used in
the Plant Variety Protection Act, by some
heirloom assemblages, and in the vernacular
permission to information-disseminators'

For example, in paragraph 8, the state-
ment “adapted plant varieties…”
could easily be written as “adapted cultivars
(a cultivar is an agricultural plant selected or bred for certain
desirable characteristics, known as a variety in the vernacular,
whereas a variety is a subgroup of a plant spe-
cies)…” Such a mi-
nor inclusion the first time that the correct term “cultivar”
is used in any article would, over time and repeated usage,
lead to the widespread use of correct terminology.

There are other concerns about the article.
Indicates that diverse perspectives will be
incorporated into the increasing collaborations occurring among
farmers, seed companies, and a few plant breed-
ers. There is a participatory plant breeding in the quest for
phenotypes (expressions of the genetic makeup of a plant),
which may perform better in organic farming.

The title implies that new products will
be favored over the ones used since the 19th century
principles developed by persons like von
Linne and organizations such as the Rothamsted
England and U.S. land grant colleges. This is a laud-
able goal and obviously needs to be explored
further using proven and repeatable scientific principles.

In paragraph 3, I find the statement “farming practices that
invigorate the soil” to be ambiguous, equivocal,
and intriguing. Even though I have studied several aspects
of soil science (soil physics, chemistry, fertility, and...