Human population is expected to be more than 9 billion by 2050. This will bring along the challenge of producing more crops to meet increasing demands for food, feed, fiber, and fuel. Dealing with these challenges not only requires cutting-edge research and relevant outreach, but also effective agronomy education.

We experienced a decline in the number of undergraduate agronomy and crop science degrees conferred by U.S. colleges and universities in the early to mid-2000s. However, from a 10-year low of graduating only 376 in 2006, we have since observed a 47% increase in agronomists (Fig. 1). This trend parallels the recent increase in membership of the Students in Agronomy, Soils, and Environmental Sciences (SASES)—the undergraduate arm of CSSA, SSSA, and ASA. Much of this increased interest in agronomy as a major field is fueled by the current upswing in the global agricultural industry.

The increasing trend in the number of new agronomists is great news. However, the increase in quantity has to be coupled by a continuous improvement in the quality of our agronomy education. Teachers of Agronomy and Crop Science courses have to continue to adapt and/or reinvent their instructional methods to ensure that we equip students with tools necessary to deal with future challenges.

Our Focus and Membership

The Undergraduate Education Community is under the Education and Extension Section of the ASA. The community primarily aims to organize topical sessions and symposia during the ASA Annual Meeting. These sessions and symposia will serve as platforms for agronomy educators to present and discuss the following:

1. effective teaching methods
2. issues related to recruitment and retention of undergraduate students
3. distance learning, international experiences, and new technologies
4. development of and assessment methodologies for degree programs and courses
5. promoting undergraduate student activities

The community currently has 485 active members, with 90% based in the U.S., 5% from the Americas, and the remaining 5% from Europe, Africa, Australia, and Asia. Our members are involved in teaching basic courses like Fundamentals of Crop Production to the more applied courses such as Farming Systems, Farm Mechanization, and Weed Science. Many of our members also serve as mentors of undergraduate researchers, coaches of judging teams, and advisers of agronomy/crop science-related clubs.

Early this year, the ASA board has approved the merger of the ASA Advisers Developing Undergraduate Student Activities Community with the Undergraduate Education Community. This paved the way for the inclusion of promoting undergraduate student activities into the goals of the community.

This Year’s Sessions

At this year’s meeting at Minneapolis, MN, the community will have an oral and a poster topical session to accommodate presentations and subsequent discussions on classroom management, development of agronomy programs, alternative teaching methods, student recruitment, promotion of agronomy to minority groups, course assessment, and other topics related to agronomy teaching. An oral topical session was also co-organized with the ASA Social Media in Education/Extension Community for presentations and subsequent discussions on helpful techniques of using social media in classes.

We welcome input and questions: Dr. Sergio Abit, Community Leader, Oklahoma State University (sergio.abit@okstate.edu); and Dr. Kulbhushan Grover, Vice Leader, New Mexico State University (kgrover@nmsu.edu).

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