As agronomists, we have many amazing stories to tell about how the work that we do impacts the well-being of humanity and the earth. Additionally, there are many complex and divisive issues that affect the science and practice of agronomy. However, our stories often get lost in the midst of the cacophony surrounding food and agricultural issues. And the thoughtful dialog that needs to occur to build better understanding of diverse perspectives often doesn’t happen—instead, both sides talk past each other without stopping to listen to differing perspectives.

We can never move forward at the pace that agronomic science and practice need to under this status quo. ASA is undertaking several initiatives, with our partner Societies and others, to position ourselves to have a more effective voice and to help create a space for meaningful dialog about important topics related to sustainable agriculture, food systems, and health agroecosystems. First, the September issue of CSA News magazine will describe Science Frontiers reports recently released by ASA, CSSA, and SSSA. These documents articulate each Society’s priorities to address a unified grand challenge “To sustainably improve the human condition for a growing population in a changing environment” and provide language that we, as individuals or as a Society, can draw on to communicate a consistent, coherent message to diverse audiences. Consistency and coherence, in simple straightforward language, is essential for communication in a sound-bite era.

Additionally, I recently appointed the first members of a new Communications Committee (A522) that will serve as a resource to the Public and Science Communications office. Specifically, the committee will participate in the creation of a communications/marketing plan for the Society. The communications/marketing plan will identify key issues, identify best practices that members are currently using to communicate agronomic topics to the general public, create an ASA Grand Communications Challenges report, and assist with the development of a communications response team. It is essential that we keep our highest priority issues coordinated and fresh in the public’s mind. While it is not to be always reactive, it is necessary that we have a plan in place that we can activate at a moment’s notice to rapidly respond with science-based messages related to emerging or hot issues that affect our discipline.

The Science Frontiers and the new Communications Committee are key to helping prioritize and articulate our top issues. An additional communication challenge is to create venues and opportunities for in-depth, thoughtful exchange of knowledge and ideas. Issues such as climate change, GMO crops, animal agriculture, water, and others often are presented as sound bites, but due to the importance of these issues to our future well-being and the differing perspectives that individuals bring to such topics, meaningful dialog that helps build common understanding and identify shared goals is often difficult. Our ASA strategic goal to increase specialty conferences was developed, in part, to help create venues to address this need. There is a new online form for members to propose ideas for specialty conferences (see www.acsmeetings.org/meetings), and I hope that many of you will bring your ideas forward through this mechanism.

The Board, staff, and many members are working hard to be more effective at advocating our science to diverse audiences amidst the multitude of voices that address agricultural and food issues. While the issues are complex, we must communicate them in as simple a form as possible in order to reach the most people. A critical key to success is to provide our members with the needed tools and skills to support individual efforts to communicate the agronomy stories—be it in meaningful sound bites to capture attention of new audiences or in the more complex dialog that is essential to advance toward common goals and understanding.