OK, so how in the world did this happen? How did I end up as President of ASA? My undergraduate degree is in ag education, and my graduate degrees are in soil fertility and soil chemistry. My faculty days focused on research, teaching, and extension in soil science, and for the last 25+ years, I have worked for an industry-funded organization focused on the science of plant nutrition. What gives me the right, or the will for that matter, to lead an agronomy society?

First, of course, it’s your fault since enough of you voted for me to allow it to happen. But there is another critical dimension to this rather odd introduction to my first column. It’s a dimension we will be facing in the months ahead as we immerse ourselves in another round of strategic planning for ASA. The process begins by defining just what contemporary agronomy involves and what agronomists do, or perhaps what agronomists want to be able to do in the future. It then advances into defining our unique role as ASA in serving the science of agronomy and those that perform or use that science in their professional lives.

At the 1976 ASA Annual Meeting, D. Wynne Thorne of Utah State University reminded attendees that the first president of ASA, M.A. Carleton, defined an agronomist as a person concerned with the science and art of crop production and soil management. He went on to say that agronomists must now (remember this is 1976) extend their horizons even further to be concerned with quality of the environment and the conservation, protection, and wise use of our natural resources.”

Great Diversity of Disciplines, Technical Skills

Forty years later, the field of agronomy does indeed have a large umbrella that covers an amazing diversity in disciplines and in technical skills and is central to many of the biggest challenges facing human kind. The “Science Frontier” for ASA (http://bit.ly/1m1I4p1) states three of them as sustainable intensification, enhancement of ecosystem services provided by agriculture, and advancement of socially and economically viable agriculture systems. Exciting new research tools are available for the discovery process, and impressive technologies provide opportunities for applying those discoveries in the field. What makes this all “agronomy” is an appreciation for the importance of interactions and that the parts succeed or fail based on the harmony of the whole. Early on in my career, I learned that it was futile to attempt to get nutrient management “right” without also addressing the other agronomic practices and that agronomy was a good professional home.

It’s an exciting time for ASA. We are sound financially. We have an amazing staff. The world desperately needs the science and practices our members can offer. And, our members are passionate about making a difference. We do need increased clarity of who we are as a Society and just where our priorities should be in the next few years. Our strategic plan should provide that guidance.

If you have ideas on changes in ASA that should be considered as the strategic plan is built, now is the time to make your voice heard by contacting me or any of our board members. Thanks in advance.

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