CSSA President’s Message

Building the Future of Our Society

As the current CSSA president, it is my great honor to serve the Society and its members throughout 2016. I appreciate the vote of confidence that put me in this position, and I look forward to the opportunity to help steer our organization and its resources in the coming year.

Although I’ve worked with many CSSA members in different capacities in the past, I really only know a few of you, and most of you don’t know me. So, a bit of an introduction is perhaps in order, along with an explanation about my background. Let me begin with the present. I work at the Children’s Nutrition Research Center in Houston, TX as a USDA-ARS plant physiologist but also hold the title of Professor of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine. What? A pediatrician as CSSA president? Well, not exactly...

My Ph.D. from the University of California–Davis was in botany, with a specialization in plant physiology (phloem physiology to be exact). This led me to post-doctoral positions in New Zealand, France, and Ithaca, NY, where I extended my Ph.D. research and used radioisotope techniques to study sugar transport in the phloem and iron uptake by roots. My journey wasn’t direct, as my scientific career has been dotted with stints as a furniture builder (a year at Thos. Moser Cabinetmakers) and as a self-employed carpenter. My father was a carpenter, and I grew up building houses with my dad and younger brother. Throughout my life, I’ve struggled with wanting to build things—or to do science. Somewhere along the way, I realized that it’s easier being a full-time scientist and a part-time carpenter, rather than a full-time carpenter and a part-time scientist, so here I am today! But, building is always in my blood, and I’ve been able to satisfy some of that craving by designing and creating various experimental devices throughout my research career.

The Building Continues

Now I have the chance to continue as a builder, by developing and fostering activities to promote the production of crop plants, but also in how we can use agriculture to fulfill nutritional needs for people. And, I figured there might be a thing or two that I could teach the nutrition and medical communities about plant foods, including things like Golden Rice, what nutritionists were sure what they had gotten themselves into, but my good run for over 25 years. My studies have focused on understanding how nutrients are absorbed from many plant foods, including things we’ve focused on understanding can breed and grow more nutrient-dense crops. To this day, I still have to remind my nutrition colleagues that we don’t just eat nutrients; we eat crops. To this day, I still have to remind them about young crop plants than children, so please don’t bring questions about your kids to me.

As I entered into Society activities and help facilitate the conversation about young crop plants than children, so please don’t bring questions about your kids to me. I have the chance to continue as a builder, by developing and fostering activities to promote the production of crop plants, but also in how we can use agriculture to fulfill nutritional needs for people. And, I figured there might be a thing or two that I could teach the nutrition and medical communities about plant foods, including things like Golden Rice, what nutritionists were sure what they had gotten themselves into, but my good run for over 25 years. My studies have focused on understanding how nutrients are absorbed from many plant foods, including things we’ve focused on understanding can breed and grow more nutrient-dense crops. To this day, I still have to remind them about young crop plants than children, so please don’t bring questions about your kids to me.