All three of our Societies have at least one objective in their new strategic plans focused on international engagement. The foundational science of our disciplines includes universal principles with global relevance. Many of the issues we face have a global reach. And, the expertise and resources to address them are distributed throughout the world. So, if our Societies are to be leaders in our disciplines and in their integration, international engagement is essential.

We experienced significant engagement in South Asia in 2016, especially in India. It started with the 103rd Indian Science Congress in Mysore in January where I presented an invited lecture on “Evidence-based Agronomy for Sustainable Food Security.” This Congress is comparable to the AAAS Annual Meeting in the U.S. The lecture was well received by attendees, including representatives of the CGIAR research centers and resulted in the organization of an entire special session devoted to the topic at the 4th International Agronomy Congress, which was held in New Delhi in November.

The Indian Society of Agronomy (ISA) has the tradition of expanding its annual meeting to a broader geographic scope on a four-year cycle. The 2016 meeting was the fourth international congress and included invited speakers from around the world, including several from our Societies.

Evidence-based Agronomy and Data Stewardship

I had the privilege of representing ASA as an “honored guest” and was involved in the opening session for the Congress and the presentation of ISA awards including their Fellow awards, and I gave a Congress keynote lecture, “Making Waves ... Einstein’s Lessons for Agronomy.” This lecture focused again on evidence-based agronomy, including data stewardship and the critical need for science to be more efficient, effective, and credible to enable agriculture to sustainably meet the zero hunger challenge, which was the theme of the congress.

The technical focus of our Societies at the Congress was on two topics: data stewardship/evidence-based agronomy and precision agriculture. The primary data-related event was the special session that spun out of our involvement with the Indian Science Congress. The session was jointly organized by ASA, CSSA, SSSA, CIMMYT, IPNI, and IRRI. The featured presenter was Sylvie Brouder from Purdue University who is chair of the ACSESS Data Stewardship Committee. She spoke on “Data Management Planning for Extended Data Life Cycles,” a presentation that was met with intense interest from the attendees from Indian institutes and universities as well as from several CGIAR research centers. ASA members J.K. Ladha with IRRI, Steve Phillips with IPNI, and myself were other presenters in the session. Steve Phillips was also the keynote speaker for the Precision Nutrient Management Symposium and presented a global update on advances. In addition to a keynote and lead speakers, the symposium included “rapid fire” presentations, a new feature for the Congress just as they were for us at our Phoenix Annual Meeting.

Much in Common

It is clear that we have much in common with our friends and colleagues in South Asia. Though the structure and scale of our agricultural systems are very different, our technical questions are surprisingly similar, and our professional needs are basically the same. Expanded interaction between ISA and our Societies should deliver clear benefits to us both, both professionally and culturally, and we could say the same for societies with roots in other regions of the world as well. An exciting development out of the Congress was discussion considering our increased collaboration in organizing the next International Agronomy Congress being planned for 2020 to be held outside of India and how that might become truly a world agronomy event. Watch for developments in the years ahead.

A special treat for me following my keynote lecture was when a young Indian researcher waited in line to meet me just to say, “You make me proud to be an agronomist”. Mission accomplished!

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