A change in Washington always re-vives concerns about the funding climate for scientific research. The new administration has given few clear indications of the direction it will take with respect to federal support of science or agriculture. Despite this uncertainty, I feel that this is a great opportunity for all of us to focus on making our science accessible to the public. If we want our work to be supported, we need to make the case that it is valuable to the country and worthy of taxpayer dollars.

It’s easy to complain that people don’t understand what we do and that they don’t recognize the value of our research. But at least some of the blame needs to fall on ourselves. We can do a better job of translating scientific jargon into lay terms and making complex subjects clear. In fact, when you get right down to it, we could also do this in our own scientific writing; obfuscation is not desirable!

CSSA and our sister Societies have been working to expand the reach of research published in our journals and presented at our conferences. The science communications team, led by Susan Fisk in Madison, WI, produces about 50 news stories each year, published on our websites and disseminated to news outlets and through social media. The communications team is always looking for news stories to promote—if you have an exciting paper coming out, let’s spread the word! Work with your journal editors or contact Susan directly with your ideas (sfisk@sciencesocieties.org).

As the Annual Meeting nears each year, the communications team offers workshops to help presenters get their message refined and on target. They also host a photo contest, and photography pointers because…well, a picture is worth 1,000 words, and the public likes them.

Many scientists with extension appointments regularly publish articles in various farm press outlets. Even without an extension appointment, however, scientists should consider writing periodically for these publications. They are often looking for stories, and writing a clear, straightforward article on even very basic research can be both interesting and understandable for the readers.

Early in my career, I once had an emeritus faculty member tell me that as a rule of thumb, we should shoot for six popular press articles for each scientific article! I’m not sure that is in the cards, but certainly, getting something in a mainstream farm press or a local newspaper occasionally should be possible if we put our minds to it.

I know we are all busy and that finding time to write a short article can be daunting. But we need to tell our story. We need to make sure that the people we are ostensibly helping—and working for—can understand what we do. In many ways, our future depends on it!