ASA President’s Message

Transitions—Opportunities for Growth, Renewal, and Gratitude

The new year brings a sense of transition and renewal to all of us, and it is also the time of transition for ASA leadership. We are blessed to have had Past President Jessica Davis lead us for the past year—with the able guidance of then Past President Paul Fixen—and I thank Jessica and Paul in advance for their continued guidance this year. I also welcome Gary Pierzynski, ASA President-elect, who is already busy putting together a great program for our 2018 meeting in Baltimore. Our three-year leadership cycle and excellent ACSESS staff provide real continuity and value to our membership through this transition.

On 1 Dec. 2017, I felt humbled to participate in another transition, this one the retirement of SSSA Past President (1980–1981) Dr. B.A. (Bob) Stewart, Director of the Dryland Agriculture Institute at West Texas A&M University after 24 years of service in that position. The occasion was truly remarkable because I also attended Bob’s retirement from USDA-ARS in 1993 after 40 years of service, most with the Conservation & Production Research Laboratory at Bushland, TX. Bob’s career, both with ARS and West Texas A&M, included many transitions of place (Oklahoma, Colorado, Texas, and in many other countries) and role (research soil scientist, laboratory director, institute director, and author of many books). Bob is a master of transitions from whom we can all learn.

As we transition into this new year with a new cycle of research, teaching, research, and service, let’s remember Bob’s example and be faced with transitions, some painful, but with the right attitude and working together in gratitude, we can find success in our new ventures wherever they may be.

Another transition our profession is now seeing is the transition to retirement of the baby boom generation. In the 1990s, we saw a generational shift in agricultural research as the generation educated at the end of WWII, often with the aid of the GI Bill, largely retired from active research. Most of that generation did not deal in digital data as have succeeding generations. Their paper records, occupying many file cabinets, are mostly lost to future generations due to the labor needed to digitize them. The so-called baby boomers, however, became scientists as the computer revolution was beginning, and most of their data exists in digital form. As long-term ecological and agroecosystem research networks and data-intensive modeling efforts such as AgMIP are showing, these long-term digital records are essential for our future research.

Worth 1,000 Words

Each month, we highlight a photo that demonstrates great techniques to illustrate research. This month, we thank Thomas Stefaniak for this photo of a chickpea breeder at work. This photo:

• shows painstaking nature of the work;
• brings in the human element;
• gives sense of the scale of the work with the plants and greenhouse surroundings; and