Our Society journals are critical to the visibility and viability of ASA, SSSA and CSSA. Maintaining or improving their quality depends not only on submissions of cutting-edge research, but also on timely, competent peer reviews. At some stage in our careers, most of us will submit our research to one or more of the Societies’ top-tier, peer-reviewed journals. Those submissions will be evaluated by our peers, who provide voluntary, constructive reviews intended to improve the submission (or to suggest, nicely, that it be targeted elsewhere). The reviewer is critical to the progress of science.

However, the age-old issue of getting timely and complete reviews has become even more important as we compete with an increasing number of journals from commercial publishers. In an increasingly competitive publication world, constructive and timely reviews reduce the turnaround time of manuscripts from submission to acceptance.

Rapid publication of results, especially in hot topic areas, will lead authors to submit future articles to the journal, potentially enhancing the quality metrics of the journals, including the impact factor. This, in turn, benefits everyone else publishing in our journals.

Those of us who have published in our journals realize the importance of the review process, not only in getting our work validated, but also in improving our own ability to write a clear, concise manuscript. Reviewing is a mutually beneficial process, providing a great learning process for the reviewer, in addition to providing authors with constructive suggestions for improvement. Reviewing is also an excellent way to stay current in your area of science, even if just to come to the conclusion that you wouldn’t do what the author of the paper just did.

When you are asked to review, please respond quickly to the request; if you agree, please give the review a high pri-

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Support Your Colleagues, Journals by Reviewing Manuscripts
by Andrew Sharpley, Beth Guertal, Charlie Brummer, and Bill Cook

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In Memoriam

R. John Hanks

John Hanks, 87, died peacefully on 18 Dec. 2014 in Logan, UT. He was a quiet man with an inquisitive mind and a whimsical sense of humor that inspired friendly exchange and shaped his “fatherly” leadership style. Colleagues and generations of students knew that behind his unassuming demeanor and smiling eyes was a genuine scientific pioneer, a quiet giant in soil physics. John was among the first few to recognize the importance of computer models, and he subsequently contributed to one of the earliest numerical models in soil physics. His deep understanding of soil physics and plant growth were grounded in his practical knowledge of how things really work in the field—a tenet communicated to his graduate students was to “always keep one foot in the field.”

John graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1953 as Champ Tanner’s first doctoral student. He then spent nearly a decade in Manhattan, KS as a researcher with the USDA. In 1962, he moved to Fort Collins, CO as a research leader with the USDA. His work with the USDA left a lasting impression on our understanding of bare soil evaporation—not many contemporary soil physicists could guess how radiation and wind affect soil evaporation differently. In 1968, John joined Utah State University as a professor of soil physics. He delighted in the process of discovery and in being a vehicle for teaching and propelling others to excellence. A review of John’s list of publications shows a wide breadth of interests and abilities that mark a golden era in soil physics with an exponential growth in knowledge and measurement methods. John maintained a keen interest in plant–soil–atmosphere interactions leading to the development of some of the earliest numerical plant growth and water uptake models. His work was motivated by pragmatic questions concerning how crop yields are affected by water management, irrigation water salinity, and varied soil conditions. John always enjoyed tinkering with sensors and instruments—his work contributed to several innovative measurement techniques that remain in practical use today.

John maintained a wide range of international activities as a consultant and providing short courses. The diversity of his 40+ graduate students is a testament to his genuine interest in and appreciation for people from all backgrounds, and his many former students remained lifelong colleagues and friends. John’s real scientific legacy is imprinted in the careers of his many students and in the lives of future generations of students who would inherit his deep commitment for the profession, for field measurements, his tenacity in fixing a measurement system, his sense of objective skepticism and integrity, and above all, his humanity and commitment to students, young scientists, and others in need. If you are a soil physics student or an environmental scientist, consider that every time you run a numerical model to solve an unsaturated flow problem or model plant water uptake you are walking in the footsteps of a humble giant—John Hanks from Salem, UT.

—Dani Or, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH-Zurich; Grant Cardon, Utah State University; and Jon Wraith, University of New Hampshire

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Reviewing Manuscripts

ority. Holding a manuscript for review creates a bottleneck that’s difficult to overcome later in the process. Accept as many requests as you can, but don’t commit to more than you can handle. Make it your policy to complete reviews well before the deadline.

Clearly, timeliness in the review process is very important. For example, early career scientists have a limited time to get manuscripts published, and extra months can greatly affect the quality of their dossier. Regardless of our career stage, we all expect rapid turn-around of our manuscripts, so that we can get our results to press as soon as possible.

All authors, but especially members, should consider reviewing as part of the publication process. By reviewing our colleagues’ research manuscripts, we are giving back to a process from which many of us have benefited greatly. So the next time you get a request to review a manuscript, give it serious consideration, and if you agree, get it done on time. Your submitted manuscript may just be the next one that needs a quality and thorough review.

A. Sharpley, SSSA editor-in-chief (EIC); B. Guertal, ASA EIC; C. Brummer, CSSA EIC; and B. Cook, director of publications

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