Most agronomists would agree on these two points: explaining what their job encompasses is complicated and most people do not identify with the word “agronomy” or “agronomist.”

Nels Hansen, a professor of agronomy at Brigham Young University–Idaho (BYU-Idaho), wants to be part of solving that communication gap. Along with Christian Malwam, a professor of communication at BYU-Idaho, Hansen completed a Reinvest ASA project proposal in 2015. The goal? Increase public awareness of agronomy by creating videos. The series of four videos is called “Agronomy Feeds the World.” After receiving funding, Hansen and Malwam, along with key ACSESS staff, began their efforts to create video communications explaining agronomy.

“Most people understand food has its beginnings on farms,” Hansen says. “But, they remain unaware of the science of agronomy and how those engaged in it have worked to align food production with population growth. In 2014, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs reported that more than half of the global human population now lives in urban landscapes. A physical disconnect from rural landscapes will lead to mental and emotional disconnect as well. Members of ASA need to reach out to and increase the awareness of people living in urban as well as rural communities.”

During 2015 and 2016, Hansen, Malwam, and ACSESS’s public and science communications director, Susan Fisk, developed scripts and story boards that would guide the filming process. Hansen also serves on ASA’s K-12 committee.

“We knew that the public was very interested about certain food and gardening topics based on research that ASA completed in early 2015,” Fisk says. “We based the core idea of each video around one of these topics. Finally, we used common communication tools—shared values and experiences—to develop the videography and editing techniques that Christian would use.”

Great Tool for Members to Tell Their Story

Hansen developed the videos with ASA members in mind. “Members can use the videos to dynamically convey what agronomy is and how members of ASA are engaged in meeting the food needs of an increasing global human population. We wanted to use video to show how agronomists work for a healthy and sustainable standard of food production.”

“The Reinvest ASA program was announced at the same time I was wondering what I could do to increase a positive awareness of creative and meaningful ways agronomists are meeting global challenges,” Hansen says. “I was excited to collaborate with ASA staff to produce videos available for Society members to share through social media. I think it is safe to say this was a learning experience for everyone involved, but I think we produced media that is richer than what I originally envisioned when I first submitted a proposal. As Society members, we need to tell our story in the medium most people interact with today. I strongly encourage Society members to consider how they might engage with the Reinvest ASA program to improve student, member, and public experience with the science of agronomy.”

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‘Agronomy Feeds the World’ Videos Created

Reinvest ASA Funds Used to Invest in Communications

by Susan Fisk
As a non-agronomist, it was a real eye-opener for me to engage with many of the growing processes that I took for granted as a consumer,” Malwam says. “My perspective has really changed. I’m quite the ambassador for soil health and water management now in my own home and garden!”

Another exciting aspect of the Agronomy Feeds the World video series is how well it coordinates with content from the Agronomy: Grow With It! book completed in 2016. “I think Comfort Ateh, Melanie Bayles, Greg Welbaum, and Judy Mannes were wildly successful with the Reinvest ASA project they completed last year with the book,” Hansen says. “It’s a culmination of work by Society members who care deeply about capturing what agronomy is and making it accessible to the K-12 market…the similarities between the book and the videos express the shared vision of Society members.” The Agronomy Feeds the Word videos will be linked to various learning activities on the book’s website, www.agronomy4me.org.

Increasing Awareness of Agronomy

The videos are available for viewing on ASA’s YouTube channel. Each video starts with families and individuals in familiar places—their kitchens prepping food, at the grocery store and farmers’ market buying food, and working in their home gardens. Then the videos show agronomists and growers in the fields managing their production techniques. Each video also includes, on screen, a short definition of agronomists: “Experts in soil and crop management.”

“This short definition, in light of all the information being given in the videos, is enough to help increase awareness of the word agronomy,” Hansen says. “It’s a beginning that will aid the ongoing efforts of ASA to bring agronomy and agronomists to the forefront of public conversations. But it’s only one part of members interacting with the public—the more agronomists work with the public, the more our science will be understood.”

The videos will be promoted on social media, but member use is really core to the videos’ potential success. “Each time a member goes out to give a public talk, talks to a classroom, or has the public come to field days, we hope they show these videos,” Fisk says.

“It’s our hope that the videos will pique interest and guide people to ask more questions of agronomists,” Hansen says.

Thanks to Beth Guertal and Elyssa McFarland, both members of the ASA communications committee, and staff member Martha Pings, who reviewed the scripts. Guertal is also the ASA Editor-in-Chief.

View the videos on ASA’s YouTube site at: http://bit.ly/2mBIANC. All the videos are available in closed caption formatting.

S. Fisk, director of science and public communications for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA

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AGRONOMY—GROW WITH IT!

Comfort Ateh, Melanie Bayles, Greg Welbaum, and Judy Mannes

Agronomy—Grow with It! explores the science ASA-CSSA-SSSA members live. Agronomy tackles the big challenge: How can we feed the world, adapt to a changing climate, and protect our environment?

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