Strong partnerships naturally germinate from mutual values. Case in point: the memorandum of understanding signed in June by ASA, CSSA, and SSSA and The Nature Conservancy.

The partnership grew out of a shared goal to empower America’s growers with pragmatic, science-based practices. The agreement lays out a framework for using the organizations’ strengths to advance the science of soil health.

“The members of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA provide ongoing research and education in soil health and nutrient management. The Conservancy has a focus on these same issues. This partnership advances our mutual commitment to sustainable agricultural lands,” says Ellen Bergfeld, CEO of the three Societies.

“With a common commitment to science and the improved sustainability of America’s agricultural lands, we are pleased to partner with ASA, CSSA, and SSSA,” says Larry Clemens, director of The Nature Conservancy’s North America Agriculture Program. “Together, we will advance the science of soil health and nutrient management while helping America’s farmers meet growing crop demands and safeguard natural resources.”

Last year, the Conservancy supported the Societies’ development of an advanced certification in nutrient management for Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs). Of the more than 13,000 CCAs in North America, nearly 300 passed the rigorous exam for this specialized certification. More information can be found here: www.certifiedcropadviser.org/exams/registration/4rmmp.

“CCAs, particularly those certified in the 4R principles—applying the right nutrients at the right rate, right time, and in the right place—are among the soil’s best allies in helping growers improve soil health and water quality,” Bergfeld says.

Building Broad Support for Soil Health

The Nature Conservancy along with three SSSA divisions and an ASA Community are planning a follow-up half-day session focusing on soil health (http://bit.ly/2xI1Ym) at the Societies’ Annual Meeting in October.

The memorandum of understanding stresses the importance of building broad support throughout the United States for soil health. It includes a commitment to advance policies, build consensus for standardized measurements, and improve land management practices.

“Healthy soil is crucial for clean water,” Clemens says. “By improving soil health across U.S. croplands, we not only ensure the long-term viability of U.S. farming, but we decrease erosion and nutrient runoff, thereby improving water quality for people and nature.”

“The Conservancy and the Societies help keep valued agricultural lands in production. The Societies disseminate the best scientific information to support agricultural production while improving the environmental footprint,” Bergfeld says. “The memorandum will help us expand educational offerings. It will also connect state and regional Conservancy staff with CCA boards for local collaboration.”

Left: Healthy soil contributes to healthy crops and healthy watersheds. The memorandum of understanding between the Societies and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) promotes this shared goal. Photo by Matthew Fincham. Right: From l to r: Ellen Bergfeld (CEO of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA), Luther Smith (Director of Professional Development and Business Relations for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA), Larry Clemens (TNC Director of North America Agriculture Program), and Carrie Vollmer-Sanders (TNC Nutrient Strategy Manager).