Executive Committee Statements

IN JANUARY, the members of the Tri-Societies Executive Committee traveled to Washington, DC, to meet with selected members of Congress and their aides, and with officials of the USDA. The Committee presented a series of statements on contemporary topics. The Executive Committee consists of Presidents Donald A. Holt, American Society of Agronomy (ASA); C. Jerry Nelson, Crop Science Society of America (CSSA); and Dennis R. Keeney, Soil Science Society of America (SSSA); Presidents-elect Edward C.A. Runge, ASA; Calvin O. Qualset, CSSA; and John J. Mortvedt, SSSA; Past Presidents Robert G. Gast, ASA; Donald N. Duvick, CSSA; and Larry L. Boersma, SSSA; and ASA-CSSA-SSSA Executive Vice President Robert F Barnes. The following summary contains the points made by the Committee in these statements. These are not intended to reflect the views of the entire membership of the Tri-Societies, but only the persons involved.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH FUNDING

It is essential for U.S. agriculture to have a strong research and development program if our industry is to be competitive in a global economy. Many of the more than 12,000 ASA members are engaged in such research, both private and public, and are prepared to increase their efforts to maintain a strong U.S. agriculture. Yet, current levels of public funding for the agricultural research system are inadequate to support existing, much less expanded programs. Studies show that USDA funding for research remains at 1967 levels in constant dollars and that USDA research money for universities is second lowest of the six major federal research funding agencies. Thus, new and innovative approaches are needed if a fully effective and dynamic agricultural research program is to be provided for the future. Further, such information must be effectively conveyed to the public decisionmakers in a timely manner. These approaches must:

- Assure that appropriated funds for research and education are efficiently administered and accounted for.
- Assess the full implications of continued inadequate levels.
- Provide for decentralized priority setting and management of applied research and extension programs.
- Assure that existing funding is applied to priority research activities.
- Use cooperation between public and private agencies to solve problems.

The following factors should be considered when seeking alternative approaches for increased agricultural research:

- There must be a continuum from basic to applied research.
- For maximum effectiveness, policies and funding of basic and applied research and related extension programs should be integrated in the same organizations.
- It is essential to have an applied research program to capture the benefits of basic science advances.
- Administration of research funds must recognize that most agricultural research takes a period of years (from five to 15 years) to reach fruition.
- Funding approaches need to include mechanisms for fostering interdisciplinary research that is focused on society's most important problems or opportunities at the time. There also must be a mechanism for refocusing research efforts as problems change.
- Longer-term funding must be provided to assure maintenance and development of the basic scientific expertise and institutions needed to train future scientists and to respond to society's changing needs.
- Concurrent with technological advances, a strong, sustained research effort is needed to assure continued gains in agricultural development.