Thoughts on Professionalism

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In more than 30 years of soil survey work I have gone to the field or sat in meetings with many prominent in the field of soil science and resource conservation. I have had the opportunity to look at landscapes and into pits with Charles Kellogg, Roy Simonson, Bill Johnson, Andy Aandahl, and many others. I've had the occasion to discuss soil surveys and the philosophy of soil surveys with these men. Field time with Drs. Condra, Love, Dyksterhuis, and others prominent in other disciplines helped to broaden my perspective.

My thoughts on professionalism have their basis in discussions with these men and others and the written word. My thoughts are also stirred by others not so prominent in their fields.

The question we all need to ask ourselves, "Am I a professional soil scientist or merely a soil mapper?" For some of us the question becomes, "Am I a soil scientist or do I just shuffle papers about soil?" I found it much easier to be a soil scientist when I was in the field.

Maybe you have already answered the question in your mind. Before we make a declaration, let us examine some points on what constitutes a professional.

For some of us we can look at the wall behind our desks and see an American Registry of Certified Professionals in Agronomy, Crops and Soils (ARCPACS) certificate that states we are a certified professional soil scientist. Before you get puffed up about your ARCPACS certificate, I saw one hanging in a mechanics shop. I would still recommend certification. It expresses a willingness to adhere to professional standards and a desire to stay a professional. Certification is only a route to professionalism—but not the only route.

A professional belongs to a professional society. He not only belongs but he participates. The professional selects the society or societies that best fit his or her needs—Soil Science Society, Soil Conservation Society, Range Society, etc. I believe that one professional society is a minimum for a professional.

You will note that I use the terms "professional" and "soil scientist" interchangeably. Either way I am referring to a professional soil scientist. Remember, there is a difference between a soil scientist and a person with a Civil Service job classification of soil scientist.

On several occasions, I have heard Dr. Aandahl state: "A soil scientist without his notebook is a soil scientist off duty." If we spend too much of our field time off duty, then we relegate ourselves to being a soil mapper. On field reviews we have noted that some don't carry a notebook. At times I find myself going back to my desk for a notebook to take to the field. I may not write in the notebook, but I am on duty. Also, make sure that you have a pencil with your notebook.

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