A Tale of Dirty Legislation
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"Legislation is like sausage … You never want to know what went in to it"—Anonymous

After years of waiting in the soil pits and trenches of rural and urban Minnesota, the soil scientists of the Minnesota Association of Professional Soil Scientists (MAPSS) were able to negotiate the legislative mine fields to establish an official Minnesota state soil. This is the tale of MAPSS’s efforts to guide (push, pull, and pry) to have the legislation passed. Read on for an explanation of the title of the article.

The effort started in 1985 when MAPSS formed a State Soil Committee, which was charged with finding a shining example of a soil series worthy of becoming Minnesota’s official state soil. The committee and members worked for a year compiling a recommendation as to the merits of naming a state soil, and at the MAPSS annual meeting in 1986, they reported that four essential criteria should be used by the members for selecting the state soil. The criteria were that the soil must: (1) have its type location in Minnesota, (2) be extensive, (3) be economically important, and (4) be photogenic (teachable). Seven soils were nominated, but one was eliminated because it was a Michigan soil.

Brief presentations were made by each soil’s sponsor, including a presentation made by a member dressed as the French explorer Pierre-Charles Le Sueur (his nominated soil was Le Sueur). Following the presentations, 51 members voted for their choice (ballots were not reviewed during the meeting), and a motion was made and passed to form two committees: (1) a Legislative Committee and (2) an Education Committee.

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State Soil or State Muffin?
The blueberry growers of Minnesota proposed the blueberry muffin as the “state muffin.” A group of grade school children also proposed the giant beaver (Castoroides ohiensis) as the state fossil. With this being an election year, there was concern that a state soil may seem trivial if introduced with a “state muffin” and a “state fossil.” Besides, how could a group of field-hardened soil scientists compete with cute grade school children and a luscious vision of a “blueberry muffin?”

There was also a peat mining organization that wanted an organic soil as the state soil. Hmm, how happy would we be with “Bullwinkle” as the state soil? Our legislative supporters strongly urged us to wait until after the elections in the fall, so a decision was made not to introduce the state soil bill in 1988. The state muffin passed, but the state fossil did not pass and was criticized by the legislature because the word “Ohio” was part of the scientific name. Happily, Bullwinkle remained in Frostbite Falls, MN.

At the December 1988 MAPSS annual meeting, there was a presentation made about hiring a lobbyist for the state soil