Science Societies

Back to school, back to ‘normal’

By April Ulery, SSSA President, aulery@nmsu.edu

August 1, 2021



It’s that time of year when we start thinking about getting ourselves or our kids back to the classroom—*hopefully in person this fall*. While writing this article, it appears that we have survived the COVID pandemic, and for those who lost family and friends along the

way, my heart goes out to you. The challenge of the last 18 months has exposed strengths and weaknesses in our society and in ourselves, and the experience has touched us all in one way or another.

But even during the pandemic, some things didn't change, including our need for nutritious food, clean water, and shelter; products and services aided by many in SSSA. Those of us fortunate enough to be working in the agricultural and environmental sciences have been busy and productive over the last year writing up research, learning new ways to advise producers and students via Zoom, even figuring out how to monitor ecosystems remotely. Our technological skills have improved tremendously and, if we had the equipment and internet access, allowed us to continue meeting our goals.

Thanks to technology, personal resilience, and our ability to learn and grow, many of us have thrived during the pandemic and discovered that teleworking, virtual meetings, and online classes are quite effective and efficient for some things, but not for everything. We still learn best by doing—whether it be in the lab or the field—and many of us have come to appreciate how much we learn by interacting with others.

Annual Meeting in Person

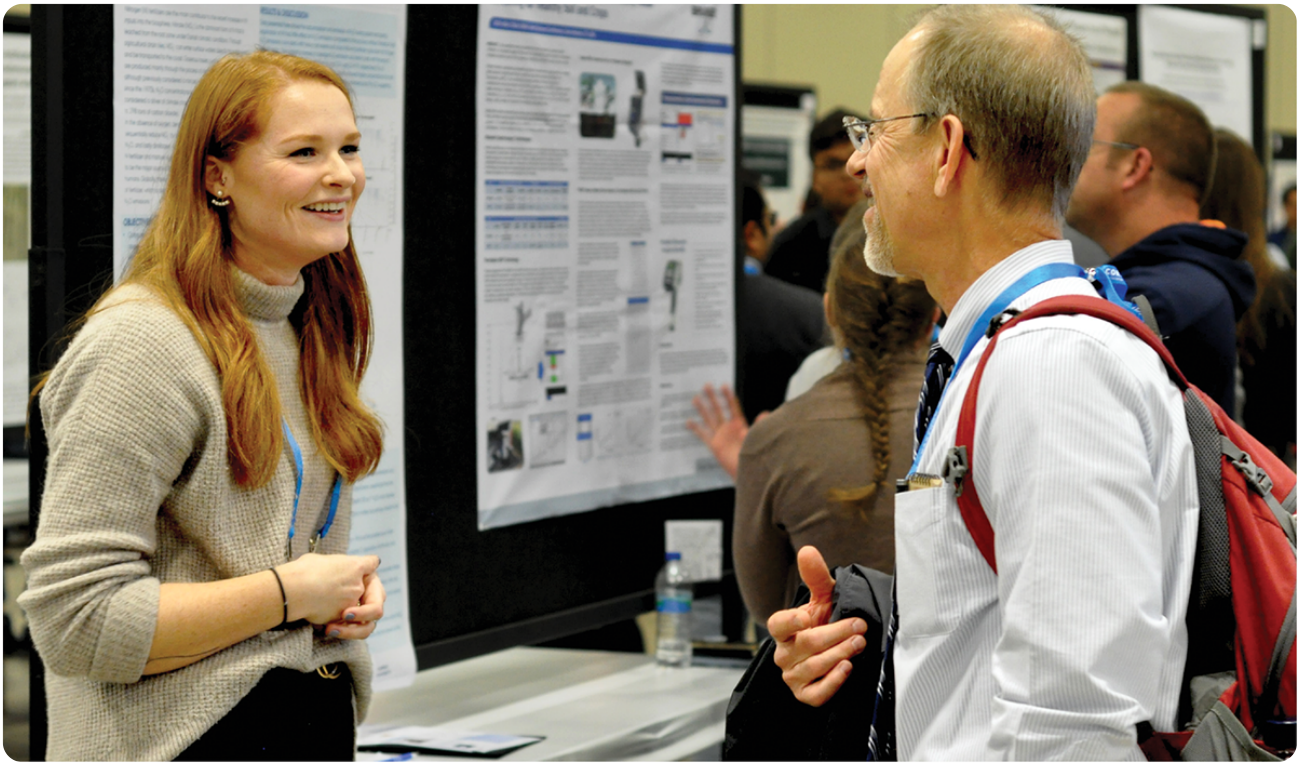
Our Annual Meeting will be in person this year for those who can travel to Salt Lake City. There are some amazing field trips and hands-on workshops planned. The scenery in Utah is beautiful and awe-inspiring, so if you can attend, be sure to get outside and see some incredible landscapes and interesting soils while you're there.

Seeing old friends at the meetings will be great, but please also try to reach out to new members and participants as well. My favorite place to meet new people is while standing in line—just strike up a conversation and discover which Society they are with

and what kind of work they do. Who knows? You probably have some common interests. Some of you wrote very insightful comments in the recent Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity Survey describing how everyone should be treated fairly and most importantly, *treat others how you would like to be treated*. Think back to the first time you attended the Annual Meeting, and show some empathy and compassion for those who might be new and unsure of the way things work. If you see someone who looks lost or is standing all alone introduce yourself and make a new professional contact. Networking is one of the best reasons to attend professional meetings, and meeting in person has particular benefits and is something that many of our members say they missed the most during the 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting.

Finally, from a friend and fellow soil scientist Ken Scheffe (1956–2021), remember: "*No matter what, we should always treasure the people, spending time around a soil pit by day and a fire pit by night, exchanging ideas and sharing our lives as one family. It is the people who help us accomplish our mission in life, not the tools and technologies.*"

Stay healthy—I look forward to seeing you all soon.



2019 Annual Meeting participants connecting at the poster session in San Antonio.

More news & perspectives

Back to issue

Back to home

Text © . The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.