Science Societies

Identifying successes and opportunities for our three societies

By Marilyn L. Warburton, David Clay, and Ron Turco

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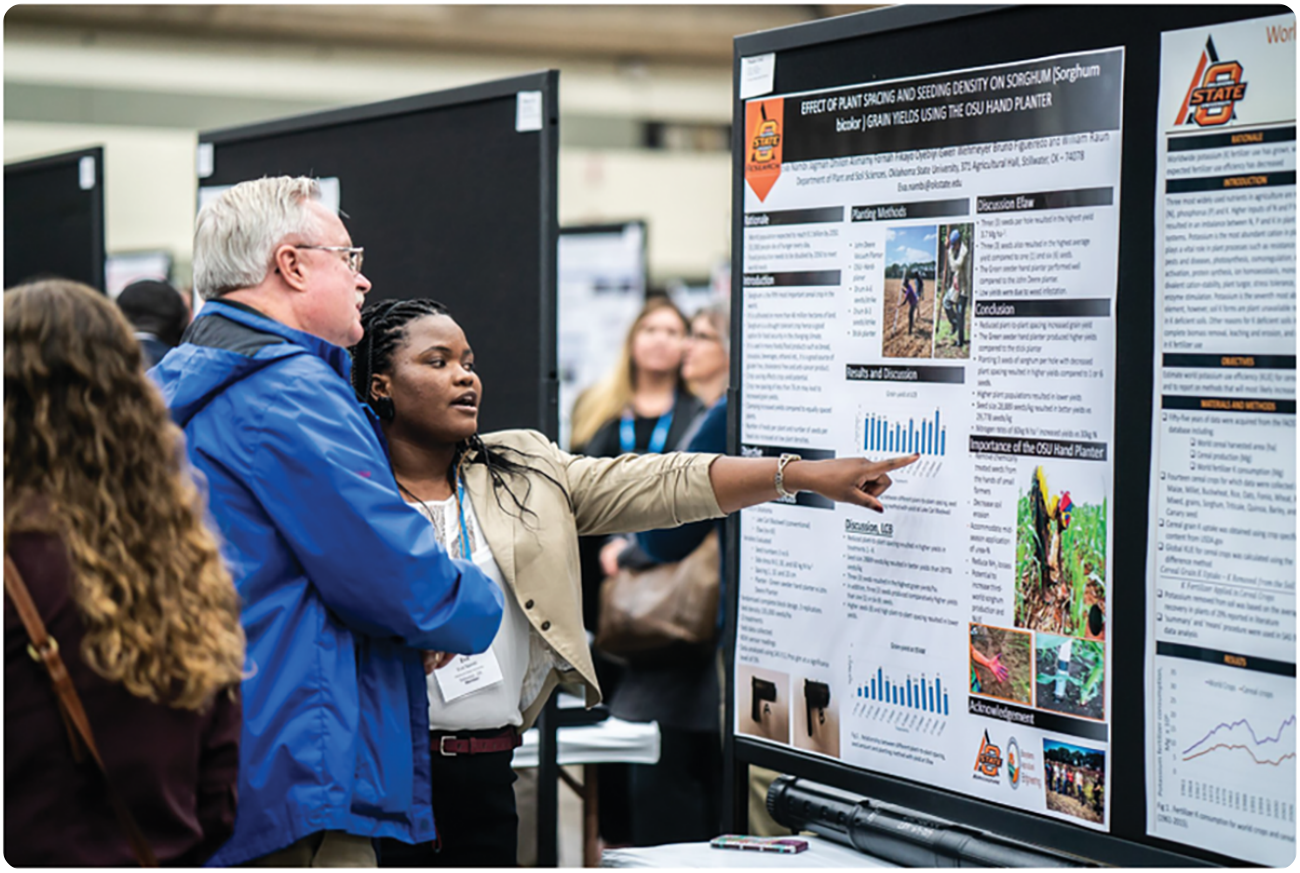

The Societies' Annual Meeting provides many opportunities for future and current graduate students, such as poster and paper competitions.

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Our three independent Societies, the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), work together on many issues ranging from increasing funding for research to meeting together at an Annual Meeting. Coordination is critical, and to help achieve an optimal arrangement, we have recently hired Jim Cudahy as our CEO. Jim has a long record in the management of non-profit organizations. He was introduced to our boards at the summer board meetings where we asked the board members to engage three to four members from their divisions or sections with three questions:

1. What are the biggest problems your institution are facing?
2. What program or service does your Society provide to you that has significant use or value?
3. Are there resource gaps that our Societies can help fill?

Below we provide a snapshot of the discussions that took place.

Journals

Primary among the members' responses was that they use the 13 peer-reviewed scientific journals to showcase their work and the transfer of scientific knowledge to others. To meet these goals, staff members and the editorial boards have been working hard to increase the impact factors. Their efforts are paying dividends as the

impact factors of our journals are on a steady climb. For example, the impact factors of *Agronomy Journal*, *Crop Science*, and the *Soil Science Society of America Journal* increased 58, 47, and 27%, respectively, from 2019 to 2021. However, our Societies' members have voiced considerable concern about the increased publication costs and how that will be sustainable in the future.

Annual Meeting

Many members consider our Annual Meeting (this year on 6–9 November in Baltimore, MD) an essential and effective program. Over the last few COVID years, meeting organization and format have been challenging, but our members feel the effort has been worthwhile as they receive many benefits from the event. Primary to our members is networking and the transfer and sharing of current information, new ideas, and approaches with others. The meeting also provides many opportunities for future and current graduate students. One of these opportunities is poster and paper competitions where the students have a chance to interact with world experts about their research. Most important to our members is the sense of community and an opportunity to build multidisciplinary teams on how to address critical challenges. This international networking event is viewed by many as unattainable in any other venue, and the experience has altered the direction of both research programs and careers.

Science Advocacy

The other program that members deemed highly significant is the work of our Science Policy Office to advocate for our sciences and represent our members in the ongoing debates in Washington, DC. Our efforts in DC have several goals, including increasing funding for agricultural, crops, and soil research and providing information to our elected officials and funding agency leaders. For example, our efforts have contributed to creating the FFAR, AgARDA, and USDA-NIFA equipment grant programs.[1] In addition,

we believe our efforts have contributed to the 29, 11, and 13% increase in funding from 2018 to 2022 for ARS, NIFA, and NSF, respectively.

Congressional Visits Day provides a great opportunity for our Societies to advocate for our sciences and represent our members in the ongoing debates in Washington, DC.

Our Societies' suggestions are made known to our federally elected congressional delegations during Congressional Visits Day. These suggestions are combined with stories on how agronomy, crop science, and soil science create high-paying jobs and help to build the U.S. economy while improving food security and ecosystem sustainability. Our science advocacy team also helps match funding to critical research areas. Research programs may be tempted to expand into areas with better financial support, regardless of whether these areas will lead to high-impact solutions for agricultural problems.

Demographic Change

The homework assignment also identified a clear call to action for the boards. Members queried felt we must work to increase the number of undergraduate and graduate students working in our disciplines. This was tied into the work done by our science advocacy team, who lobby for increased education and research funding.

One interesting trend that our members point out is that the demographics of our communities are undergoing a rapid change as the "boomer" generation moves out and others take their place. The current lack of undergraduate and graduate students makes this transition tricky. Managing this transition with mindful respect for the needs and opinions of new generations of Society members will allow a vibrant

contemporary culture to evolve. We look forward with anticipation to the infusion of new ideas, tools, solutions, and energy!

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