Science Societies

Year in review

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

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This year's Congressional Visits Day saw 114 members, students, Certified Crop Advisers, and staff meeting online with 131 congressional offices to advocate for increased USDA research funding programs in 2022. Pictured here are Chelsea Obeidy, Julie McClure, Matthew Polizzotto, and Jack Karlin meeting with Richard Parker and Katie Lample from the office of Sen. Jeff Merkley (OR).

I want to thank our SSSA Board of Directors, the headquarters staff, and all of you for your support and participation this year. COVID has continued to impact our membership numbers, activities, and finances, but we've been busy online and working towards our strategic goals. Your SSSA Board is very engaged and involved in all decisions directing our course as a Society. We are a representative body and appreciate hearing from our members.

Communicating Our Science and Advocating for More Funding

We had a virtual Congressional Visits Day this year with 114 members, students, Certified Crop Advisers, and staff meeting online with 131 congressional offices to advocate for increased USDA research funding programs in 2022. We decided to keep the visits virtual for 2022, and we'd love to include you.

We've increased our visibility and participation in the carbon markets and ecosystem services discussion. Long-term storage of carbon in the soil is important for improved soil health and productivity as well as resilience to climate change. SSSA co-sponsored and participated in several webinars and events around climate change, carbon markets, food security, and environmental issues. All three Societies worked together to release a statement, "Advancing Resilient Agriculture: Recommendations to Address Climate Change" (**https://bit.ly/3vHUQx7**), outlining actions policymakers

can take to help the U.S. mitigate climate change. Our Science Policy Committee comprised of representatives from each Society drafted the statement, which underwent careful scrutiny and editing prior to Board approval and posting on our website. Special virtual climate change issues are being planned for our journals as a follow-up to the statement. In recognition of World Food Day, Wiley presented a webinar on "New Horizons in Food Sustainability" featuring Dr. Carrie Laboski, SSSA President-Elect in 2022, targeted to researchers interested in food sustainability.

In addition to our advocacy for increased agricultural research funding, the Societies are also members of the Energy Sciences Coalition (ESC) and the Council of Scientific Society Presidents. We signed several appropriations request letters this year in favor of increasing Department of Energy (DOE), National Science Foundation (NSF), and USDA funding since we have members who get funding from energy and environment issues as well as from agriculture. One of our members, Dr. Asmeret Berhe, was nominated for the Director of the Office of Science in the DOE. For a list of our Society statements and coalition sign-on letters, visit **www.soils.org/science-policy/issues/statements**.

Our Soils Matter (**https://soilsmatter.wordpress.com**) blog averages 30,000+ views, and the About Soils page (**www.soils.org/about-soils**) averages 80,000 views per quarter. We upgraded the Discussion Board to allow division leaders to send direct email messages to members through the platform. Our Public and Science Communications Department also works with popular media reporters by providing resources to them and even setting up interviews with soil scientists. I thank those of you who have helped us by providing information and interviews.

Membership and Meetings

In trying to decide whether to meet in person or not for the Annual Meetings, all three Boards met with an epidemiologist in the spring, and after careful consideration, voted to meet in person with a 30 June deadline to pivot to virtual if needed. If you recall, June had a drop in COVID numbers, and many of us thought that we were coming out of the pandemic. Unfortunately, we weren't in the clear completely, and as cases started to rise again, the U.S. government extended strict limits on "non-essential" travel for all employees. This hit our Societies hard since about 10% of our members work for government agencies, labs, and contractors. International travel was restricted too, further cutting into our attendance numbers. At this point, we are hoping for an in-person 2022 Annual Meeting in Baltimore. The SSSA program enhancement funds will be increased from $1,500 per division to $2,000 starting in 2022.

The "Stand-Alone Annual Meeting Task Force" considered the feasibility and efficacy of a SSSA-only Annual Meeting to advance our strategic objectives, engage our members, and steward the financial resources of our organization. In order to harness and grow current interest in soil as a global resource for mitigating climate change and sustaining the health and welfare of a burgeoning world population, they proposed a special meeting for the summer of 2024. This meeting would be in addition to, not in lieu of, the scheduled 2024 Annual Meeting held in conjunction with ASA and CSSA. We will continue to meet jointly with ASA and CSSA for business meetings but will plan a different format for the special meeting and need volunteers for the planning committee.

Representation of SSSA in Other Societies

SSSA was represented at two American Geosciences Institute (AGI) virtual meetings, and I helped develop the diversity initiative, "Framework for Addressing Racial and

Ethnic Equity in Geosciences Professional Societies," which was approved by our Board and led to the establishment of an Inter-Society Diversity Committee. SSSA has a representative on that committee as well as a representative on the AGI Nominating Committee. Several of our members presented webinars during the AGU (American Geophysical Union) soil carbon sequestration series.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

I tried to increase the diversity of our SSSA committees by including various subdisciplines, geographic locations, career stages and types, as well as gender (if it was obvious from a name). In our list of volunteers, race and other characteristics are not included. I appreciate all of our volunteers and applaud you for helping SSSA continue its mission. My apologies to those of you who didn't get appointed to specific committees—please know that we value your service, and there are always opportunities to get involved, so let us know of your interests at **www.soils.org/membership/committees/volunteer**. Some committees don't accept volunteers because they are pre-populated with elected members (i.e., executives, board members, and division chairs). We welcome self-nominations for elected positions.



SSSA took several steps forward this year on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, including adding a member-at-large position focusing on DEI to the SSSA Board of Directors. Photos courtesy of (clockwise from top): Bioversity International/Alfredo Camacho, Flickr/Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Adobe Stock/Microgen, USDA/Bob Nichols, USDA/Lance Cheung, NIH/John Powell, and Adobe Stock/Dusan Kostic.

The Society approved the addition of a member-at-large position focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to the SSSA Board of Directors in a special election. The results were overwhelmingly in favor of adding a DEI Board

Representative, and now ASA and CSSA are considering a similar move. The Board also approved the Societies' DEI Statement and signed onto the AGI Diversity Framework.

We've also received money to support our diversity efforts with funding from ASF and Bayer to help underrepresented students attend our meetings as well as participate in leadership workshops. The Agronomic Science Foundation has launched the IDEAS (Inclusion, Diversity and Equity in Agricultural Sciences) Fund, which will be used to support and expand DEI initiatives. Learn more about the Fund at **https://www.a-s-f.org/asf-ideasfund**.

International Efforts

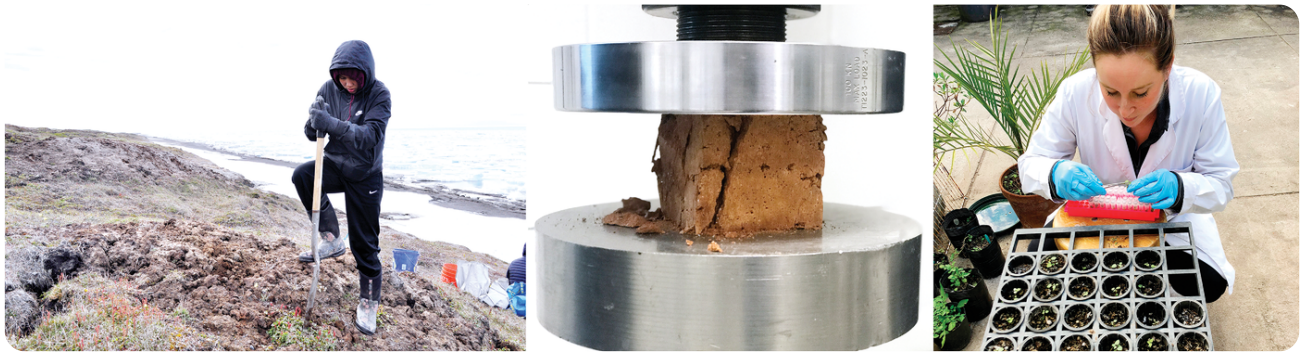
We approved an ASA, CSSA, SSSA, and ASF International Task Force to look for ways to increase DEI, external engagement, membership, and sustainability by expanding the influence of our Societies beyond our borders. We also approved a cooperative agreement with the Soil Science Society of China to establish a working group that will pursue mutual benefits for both Societies, including increasing membership, expanding publications, and building research collaborations.

The U.S. National Committee for Soil Science wants a stronger connection to our Society and the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS). The next World Congress of Soil Science is 31 July–5 Aug. 2022: **https://soils.org.uk/wcss22/**. Let's support the U.S. student soil-judging team.

Publications and Communications

All three Boards approved providing a stipend for the Editors-in-Chief (EIC) of each Society. Our new EIC is Craig Rasmussen who took office early as Interim EIC after David Myrold passed away this summer. Our goals for publications include improving impact factors and providing better review times and service to our authors. Please

consider being a reviewer and contributor for our Society journals.



There are many scientists and consultants who work in soils, or the “critical zone,” who may not identify as soil scientists, and we need to reach out to them and invite them to join SSSA, the premier professional society for soil science.

A Final Thanks

I have tried to be a voice for ALL soil scientists in all kinds of jobs, whether focused on the environment, agriculture, or other areas. I have strived to help SSSA maintain its identity separate from, but cooperative with, the ASA and CSSA. There are many scientists and consultants who work in soils, or the “critical zone,” who may not identify as soil scientists, and we need to reach out to them and invite them to join SSSA, the premier professional society for soil science.

A huge debt of gratitude goes to our headquarters staff who all do a phenomenal job keeping our Society moving forward with the times. My heartfelt thanks for everything they have done for me and for this organization!

Finally, thank you all for electing me as your SSSA president and for trusting me with this incredible honor and responsibility. I am humbled and I have learned so much from the experience and from my interactions with all of you. I look forward to paying it back with interest.

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