Science Societies

SSSA: Our Society in action

By Aaron Lee M. Daigh

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In last month's column, we reflected back into the past and attempted to glimpse into the decades ahead. This month, I want to highlight our Society in action and what we are choosing to give our time to. In this article, I'll talk about our collective action and tangible ways SSSA is working right now to serve you and advance soil science.

Committee appointments: Building the Society's leadership

One of the responsibilities I took on in December as president was appointing members to serve on SSSA committees. It is an essential action because our committees are where much of the Society's work actually happens.



SSSA maintains 85 committees, boards, and working groups, plus more than 30 joint committees with ASA and CSSA. AI-generated image courtesy of Adobe Stock/ Itsaraporn.

For context, SSSA maintains 85 committees, boards, and working groups, plus more than 30 joint committees with ASA and CSSA. These groups span everything from conference planning (such as the Kirkham Conference Committee) to student and professional awards, to communities focused on graduate students, early career members, women in science, science policy, and much more. This year, I made more than 90 appointments to SSSA committees with an additional 12 to joint committees with CSSA and ASA. Overall, we have more than 100 new appointments that started their terms in January 2026!

The process begins each fall when members can go online and self-nominate to volunteer their time and expertise on Society committees for the upcoming year. Nominations are then reviewed by the president-elect in November and December and final appointment made with terms beginning in January. Some of the high-level appointments such as the Fellows Committee require approval by the SSSA Executive Committee (consisting of the president-elect, president, and past president) to ensure the highest level of collective leadership input.

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This year, the most popular committees for volunteers were the Women in Science Committee and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, which is a reflection of our members' commitment to building an inclusive scientific community. The large number of volunteers also meant that many qualified applicants could not be placed this cycle. If you applied and were not selected, please know this reflects the depth of interest, not any shortcoming on your part. I encourage you to apply again when the next volunteer cycle opens and to reach out directly to the committee's chair to find other ways you can contribute and have input to the Society's actions. Remember to explore our committees and sign up to volunteer.

Meanwhile, elected positions (e.g., Division Chairs, Board of Directors, and Presidents) for the 2027 terms are filled through Society-wide elections. Nominations are gathered in the winter months with voting open for one month starting in early March and closing in early April. Be on the watch for news blasts and links to vote in the upcoming elections! If you've ever considered running or nominating a colleague, now is a great time to start thinking ahead for next fall's nomination period.

SSSA task force: Looking 40 years forward

In December, SSSA Past President Dr. Samira Daroub initiated a new task force titled "SSSA: Looking 40 Years Forward." The charge is ambitious and is aimed to review and creatively investigate opportunities for SSSA to ensure our structure is best suited to meet member needs over the next generation of scientists in our community.

This kind of forward-looking work is essential. At CANVAS 2025, our keynote panelists reminded us that the students entering our field today will likely have 40 years or more of a career ahead of them. The world they will face, shaped by climate change, technological transformation, and shifting policy landscapes, will demand adaptability, foresight, and innovation. Our Society must be positioned to support them, just as it has supported generations of soil scientists before.

The task force will explore questions about how we engage members, how we structure our divisions and committees, how we communicate and disseminate knowledge, and how we remain relevant in an evolving scientific landscape. Stay tuned for updates as this work progresses and opportunities for your vital input.

Congressional Visits Day: Advocacy on Capitol Hill

In February, SSSA along with our sister Societies CSSA and ASA will be on Capitol Hill for our annual Congressional Visits Day (CVD). Dozens of members will visit congressional offices in the U.S. Senate and House of Representative to discuss the importance of science funding.



In February, dozens of members will visit congressional offices in the U.S. Senate and House of Representative to discuss the importance of science funding. This photo from last year shows members meeting with Rep. Jim Baird of Indiana.

While SSSA's science policy efforts are wide ranging, our advocacy during CVD focuses on two key programs. The first is AFRI (Agriculture and Food Research Initiative), the USDA's primary extramural funding program and a cornerstone for agricultural research across the nation. The second is AgARDA (Agricultural Advanced Research and Development Authority), which was authorized by Congress in the 2018 farm bill but has yet to receive appropriations beyond just 0.5% of the total amounts authorized for the program. AgARDA is modeled after DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) and is designed to fund high-risk, high-reward projects that could transform agriculture and food systems.

The timing of these visits is strategic as they align with the congressional budget and appropriations cycle. Our advocacy also occurs alongside complementary efforts from groups like the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET), the Association of Public Land-Grant Universities (APLU), and the Agricultural Retailers Association; all of whom converge on Washington, DC to advocate for appropriations that support agricultural and natural resources research, education, extension programs, and the agricultural industry.

If you are interested in joining us for CVD, I encourage you to reach out. Each year, the Societies offer awards to help members (including students) offset costs associated with participating in CVD. Additionally, SSSA will be holding an event for the House Soil

Caucus on February 24, which will include comments from House representatives, SSSA leadership, and educational booths highlighting the vast and awesome world of soil science. This event is being organized and coordinated by Luther Smith (CAO for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA), Caroline Sowinski (Torrey Advisory Group), Dr. Jessica Chiartas (SSSA Member), Dr. Clay Robinson (SSSA Board Representative), and myself.

CANVAS 2026: Portland is calling!

Program planning for CANVAS 2026 in Portland, OR is well underway. Our 14 division chairs, Program Planning Officer Shannon Osborne, President-Elect John Kovar, and the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Meetings Team (Kristina Tarantino, Nate Ehresman, and Samantha Temby) are working hard to bring you a vibrant and exciting program this fall.



Portland, OR is the site of CANVAS 2026 this November.

Incoming presidents-elect begin their work as early as a year and a half prior to each CANVAS meeting, designing the overall meeting theme, the opening keynote, and each Society's morning plenary lectureships. The first training and coordination meeting with incoming division chairs occurs on the Monday evening of the prior year's CANVAS. So, for Portland, ideas and planning at the division level officially kicked off back on Nov. 10, 2025 in Salt Lake City. Now, your division chairs and Society leadership are hard at work shaping the program and flow for this fall.

By the time we meet in Portland, there will be more than 500 technical sessions spread across the 3.5 days of CANVAS with upwards of 60 concurrent sessions

happening at any given moment. The scale is remarkable, and the opportunity to contribute to building the program is still open through these following routes:

- **Special Session Proposals** and **SSSA Cross-Divisional Symposium Proposals** are open through February 20 and eligible for competitive program enhancement funds. If you have questions, contact your division chair, President-Elect John Kovar, Program Planning Officer Shannon Osborne, or Technical Program Manager Nate Ehresman.
- **Workshop and Tour Proposals** are open through March 27. For ideas or questions, contact Meetings Planner Samantha Temby.

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The sessions you propose and the research you present at CANVAS are not just academic exercises, they represent the tangible value of our science. In a recent commentary, my colleagues and I estimated that the research presented at each of our CANVAS meetings represents approximately $300 to $400 million in research expenditures, translating to a projected socioeconomic value of $6 to $7 billion (Daigh et al., 2025). For every dollar

invested in agricultural and natural resources research, there is a $17 or more return in economic value for the general public. This is the footprint of our collective work as a scientific community. Appropriations decisions are being shaped right now, and the CVD event occurring this month ensures that the legislators making those decisions hear directly from the scientists whose research delivers such extraordinary public value.

Getting into action: Why engagement matters

Through action and engagement within SSSA, we expand our networks, our perspective, and our impact. We connect with policymakers, mentor the next generation, and learn from colleagues across continents. We become part of a community that persists across time; one built not around a single initiative, but around a shared commitment to the fundamental understanding of soil and its role in a sustainable world.

Professional societies give that community structure, voice, and momentum. The work I have outlined in this column (committee service, long-range visioning, advocacy, and program planning that brings our members together) represents just a fraction of what is happening across SSSA at any given moment. It happens because members engage. I look forward to seeing what we accomplish together this year.

Reference

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