Science Societies

Golden Opportunity and Greenfield Scholars take to the hill

March 21, 2020



This year's group of scholars attending advocacy training.

Every year, a group of our Greenfield Scholars and Golden Opportunity Scholars travel to Washington, DC to join in advocating for agricultural research funding and learn more about science policy. On 2–3 March, eight undergraduate students joined 70 other Society members and professionals for Congressional Visits Day. This group of students was made up of four Golden Opportunity Scholars (Marjorie Hanneman—Iowa State University, Lauren Jorgenson—University of Wisconsin–Madison, Noah Winans—Kansas State University, and Madeline Henrickson—Michigan State University) and four Greenfield Scholars (Cole Berkley—South Dakota State University, Kyla Dendinger—South Dakota State University, Lizbeth Cordova—California State University–Fresno, and Blair Bennis—Iowa State University).

Students joined teams representing their home states to advocate for USDA research funding and share personal stories of how they had been impacted by research funded in the past. Altogether, these students met with four members of Congress and staff from 36 congressional offices across 10 states. We asked the students to reflect on their time in DC, and below is what they shared.

Lauren Jorgenson (WI)—"It was fantastic to see so many different offices that were supportive of agricultural research and increasing funding for it. Our group was lucky enough to meet with the Appropriations subcommittees for the House and Senate. Although ag research has bipartisan support, the reality is that there is such limited additional funding available right now. …



Members of the Kansas/Missouri team meeting Rep. Roger Marshall (KS).

Additionally, as scientists, I think a lot of us are quick to scorn those who work in politics. It was eye-opening to see how time-, space-, and budget-crunched all those folks were."

Madeline Henrickson (MI and ND)—"It was incredibly humbling to see the support for agriculture research funding on the Hill and the willingness to further economic investments into these programs."

Noah Winans (KS and MO)—"I learned a lot through science policy advocacy, both about the process and the general feelings toward agricultural research. I was very happy to see the high levels of support for agricultural research shared by the members of Congress and their staff. When they have to make tough decisions, it is always a question of whether your area will have to be cut. … It was clear that those we talked with were very supportive and know the importance of what we do. I was also very impressed with the great knowledge and understanding that the staffers possessed."

Cole Berkley (SD and MT)—"Being a Greenfield Scholar and having the opportunity to come to DC to voice my support for continued ag research was a very beneficial and educational experience. … Hearing support directly from staffers and senators for agriculture, land grant universities, and continued research left me feeling assured that AFRI will have another strong year in 2021."

Marjorie Hanneman (IA)—"My favorite part of CVD was teaching my representative how CRISPR works and the importance of crop genetic engineering. I also was able to meet scientists from all levels of their careers and network with others who are passionate about agronomic research. … The political process behind grant funding was unknown to me before this trip, and I was able to learn firsthand how these budget

decisions are made. Being able to advocate for the importance of my research was incredibly valuable."



Members of the South Dakota/Montana team meeting with Sen. John Thune (SD).

Kyla Dendinger (SD and MT)—"I enjoyed participating in CVD—it pushed me out of my comfort zone. It was a valuable platform to represent my university and my passion with our representatives to make sure that our voices are heard and continual funding is given to progressing ag research. … I enjoyed meeting with Sen. John Thune and all of the staffers who work within South Dakota's House and Senate offices."

Blair Bennis (IA)—"CVD was a great way to learn about ag policy and the importance of advocating for ag research. Learning how to effectively converse with Congress is something I can use in the future to continue advocating for agriculture. … Overall, this was a great learning experience in ag policy and left me feeling more well rounded in my ag education."

Lizbeth Cordova (CA and AZ)—"Having the opportunity to advocate for agriculture and being able to interact with members of Congress from our state was incredible. Our team had the added benefit of a having a Certified Crop Adviser, too. … I was able to expand my network and learn more about each of the projects that we were asking [to be funded]."

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