



Science
Societies

Teaching from the ground up: SSSA's outreach at teacher conference on science education

By Missy Holzer

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SSSA member Gordon Rees visits with attendees of the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) Conference on Science Education in Anaheim, CA in April 2026.

Last month, at the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) Conference on Science Education in Anaheim, CA, SSSA members engaged attendees through a workshop and booth, highlighting how soil science, agronomy, and crop science can be integrated into K–12 curricula.

For more than 15 years, the SSSA K–12 Outreach Committee has led workshops and hosted exhibits at the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) Conference on Science Education. The April 2026 conference in Anaheim, CA brought together thousands of educators eager to explore new teaching strategies and resources. As in past years, SSSA members engaged attendees through a workshop and booth, highlighting how soil science, agronomy, and crop science can be integrated into K–12 curricula.

Educators engaged through interactive outreach

Interactive displays and demonstrations drew teachers in and sparked conversations about the power of soil as a teaching tool. Many who initially believed, “I don’t teach soils,” left with a new perspective—recognizing soil as a gateway to teaching the scientific method as well as biology, chemistry, physics, and environmental science.

This year’s outreach emphasized regionally relevant topics, including wildfires and earthquake-induced liquefaction. These themes were incorporated into booth demonstrations, workshop sessions, and share-a-thon materials. Resources are

available at soils4teachers.org/nsta.

The booth featured hands-on activities (including new fire-related soil demos), posters, lesson plans, and publications such as *Soils: Get the Inside Scoop* and *Know Soil, Know Life*. SSSA members also connected with district science coordinators, preservice teacher educators, and non-formal educators—extending the reach of soil science education. Partner organizations ASA and CSSA showcased agronomy and plant science through demonstrations on ethanol production, seed germination, root systems, and erosion. Educators also picked up classroom-ready materials from agronomy4me.org.

Wildfire impacts featured in workshop

The featured workshop, *The Wildfire Effect: Understanding Soil Changes in a Fire-Prone Climate*, explored how wildfires impact soil physics, chemistry, and biology. Presenters (SSSA members Gordon Rees, Clay Robinson, Qudus Uthman, and Missy Holzer) combined scientific content with classroom-ready applications. Participants examined wildfire-affected soil samples, engaged in replicable demonstrations, and discussed how to model wildfire impacts using data. Guided discussions throughout the session revealed clear gains in understanding, and attendees were directed to additional instructional resources to support classroom implementation.



SSSA members Clay Robinson (left) and Qudus Uthman (right) meet with visitors at the National Science Teaching Association Conference on Science Education in Anaheim, CA in April 2026.

“While staffing the SSSA booth at NTSA, I was pleasantly surprised by how many teachers sought us out because they already have plans to include soil science concepts in their classes and were looking for activities and resources to support them,” says Rees. “It’s great to see that many educators recognize how important soil is, and it was great to be able to provide them with a database of material that is classroom ready. Preparing new classroom activities for our workshop on fire impacts on soils was a fun challenge and helped me focus on how to convey our science in a straightforward, simple way that still teaches key concepts. The combination of spreading the word about soils while focusing on the fundamentals is part of what I love about working on the K–12 committee.”

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Overall, SSSA connected with approximately 750 educators through the booth, workshop, and share-a-thon. The K–12 Outreach Committee continues to refresh its programming each year and will return for the 2027 NSTA Conference in Boston, MA, March 17–20.

Engaging with teacher conferences is a powerful way to inspire future soil and crop scientists. Educators and scientists alike are encouraged to participate in local and national outreach opportunities. Another avenue is the 2026 Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP), themed “Unearth a Story,” which promotes learning through topics like soil, archaeology, and local history. More information is available at:

<https://programs.cslnreads.org/>.

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