

Improving our climate of inclusivity

By Marilyn L. Warburton, David Clay, Ron Turco, Samantha Miller

| December 23, 2021



SOCIETY PRESIDENTS AND ASF CHAIR

As we move to a new calendar year, new resolutions, and new hopes, we are starting 2022 with a brief look back at the achievements and challenges of the past year. It was such a pleasure to see many of you in person in Salt Lake City in November 2021 after missing the previous in-person Annual Meeting. Although Salt Lake City was a bit different than the “normal” meeting, it was wonderful to celebrate the camaraderie

that in-person interactions can bring. We were sad to note the absence of some of our members, however, due to the continued limitations caused by the pandemic. We hope we can include more people in future meetings as the risk of the pandemic eases, and by expanding virtual opportunities for those who in the future can't or choose not to travel.

The meeting in Salt Lake City was a great success; we all had excellent opportunities to meet new people and become reinvigorated with new ideas and thoughts. Our take-home from the meeting is that it is a great time to be an agronomist, soil scientist, and crop scientist. We have new tools to help us meet the world's needs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase food production in a truly sustainable manner. However, in order to help everyone capitalize on these opportunities, the need to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) continues.



Leading with Inclusion First

Our three Societies have been working on this initiative together, and here we update our members and prospective members on our efforts. We have been talking about diversity and the desire to increase it, but our ultimate focus is to first lead with inclusion. Why inclusion? Inclusion allows all our members to show up to our Societies and be the best versions of themselves and know that their opinions are valued and heard as an essential component to the success of our missions. It means we work towards understanding one another, surpassing simple tolerance to ensure people truly value their differences. Leading our efforts with inclusion requires a culture shift that encompasses addressing equity in our programs; an improvement in diversity should naturally follow.

To use an agro-ecology example, systems with diverse crops are more stable over time. Like crops, when we foster an environment where diversity can thrive, we become stronger. Our Societies will then produce greater innovation and deeper collaborations. We are committed to an inclusive culture where all belong. This approach has to be bottom-up and top-down, and we hope to hear from members on how we can make YOU feel welcomed. Sadly, some of our members have expressed concerns of exclusion during our meeting in Salt Lake City. Along with efforts to increase diversity through a more inclusive environment, we will double down on our efforts to ensure each of you feel valued as part of our ASA, CSSA, and SSSA community. With our efforts to increase diversity through a more inclusive environment, please rest assured that we see you as a unique individual regardless of your status as part of the majority or the minority. You are a valued part of the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA community.

Having said that, we feel we need to reiterate that regardless of how much we value you, we need you to respect all the other people we value as well! By now, there is no excuse; we all know that harassment in its many forms (verbal, physical, or otherwise) is unacceptable. Please remember to act respectfully to everyone and report to Society leadership if you have seen or been targeted by disrespectful or harassing behavior during any ASA, CSSA, or SSSA event, in person or online. We take this very seriously.

Recent DEI Activities

Throughout the year, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA have been working to improve our inclusive climate, and some of the activities we have been working on include the following:

Society-Wide DEI Survey

- This survey was conducted, and the results were analyzed and presented to the boards of directors and the membership and will be used to guide the Societies in future actions, trainings, surveys, and conversations.

Communication Plan

- Creation and execution of a plan for more frequent updates on Society DEI efforts and opportunities.
- CSA News articles and information sidebars have been written to document and keep members informed on our efforts.
- Monthly reports to boards of directors.

Annual Meeting Diversity Programs

This year's Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City included two special sessions each with a panel discussion developed by the Diversity Committee and the LGBTQ+ Scientists and Allies specialty group. Pictured here are (l to r): Elizabeth Gillispie (DEI Project Consultant for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA) and Zelia Wiley and Augustine Obour (both from Kansas State University).

- Outside-funded programs have been developed to integrate those in underrepresented groups within and outside the Societies during the Annual Meeting and throughout the year.



This year's Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City included two special sessions each with a panel discussion developed by the Diversity Committee and the LGBTQ+ Scientists and Allies specialty group. Pictured here are (l to r): Elizabeth Gillispie (DEI Project Consultant for ASA, CSSA, and SSSA) and Zelia Wiley and Augustine Obour (both from Kansas State University).

- The Bridge Scholars Program has been developed and piloted with the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS)—funded by the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF).
- The Encompass Fellows/Scholars Program was developed and piloted—the 2021 program is funded by Bayer Crop Science.
- Other Annual Meeting activities included two special sessions each with a panel discussion developed by the Diversity Committee and the LGBTQ+ Scientists and Allies specialty group; LGBTQ+ Scientists and Allies mentoring program; a gathering of the Military Veterans in Agriculture specialty group; and a Social and Historical Contexts of Agronomy, Crop, and Soil Sciences poster session with 10 Society groups participating—funded by ASF.
- Diversity poster contest with 250+ registrants and 60+ participants.
- The Diversity Committee was restructured for 2022 to oversee DEI Initiatives. The three Society boards have each approved adding a DEI Member-at-Large position to their boards, who will also serve on the Diversity Committee.
- DEI Initiatives include developing plans for more inclusion and actions based on member feedback, the DEI Survey Report, the 2021 Recommendations Report, and strategic plans.

DEI Future Direction Recommendations Report

- Draft report to each Society's board of directors on recommendations for the direction of the Society's DEI activities based on member and specialty group conversations, survey results, and Society needs.
- Currently compiling feedback from the Annual Meeting and adding to the report.
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee will take the lead on turning recommendations into actionable outcomes.

- ASF continues to be one of the main drivers of funds and efforts in areas promoting and developing all members of the Societies. The ASF-IDEAS (Inclusion, Diversity and Equity in Agricultural Sciences) fund was approved this year to support the Societies and foster change. This fund seeks to provide resources to advance DEI in the agricultural and environmental science communities. More than \$25,000 was approved by ASF to support the above programs.

WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK

We will continue to work with you, our Society members, to improve our climate of inclusivity, and we want to hear from you. A feedback form has been developed so that anyone in our Societies and scientific communities may provide feedback, concerns, ideas, and suggestions to continue the work of ensuring our Societies are inclusive, equitable, and diverse. Find the form, and additional information on DEI, at: www.agronomy.org/diversity, www.crops.org/diversity, and www.soils.org/diversity.

We will continue to work with you, our Society members, and staff to improve our climate of inclusivity, and we want to hear from you. Please reach out to us at any time with your ideas, concerns, and recommendations. Our Societies work because of, and for, YOU.

More news & perspectives

Back to issue

Back to home

Text © . The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.