



**Science
Societies**

Female researchers: The forages of agronomy

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A researcher clipping forage samples for comparative nutrition evaluation. Photo by Stephen Ausmus (USDA-ARS).

Forages, as a crop within agronomy, are often overlooked compared with crops such as corn, soybeans, and cotton. Forage research supports one of the largest agriculture industries, livestock. Even livestock producers quickly forget how important forages

are to their overall production system. As a forage specialist, I often remind producers that forages are the foundation of our livestock systems.

Women are often overlooked in scientific communities similar to how the value of forage research gets dismissed. Science is often considered a male-dominated field. In fact, according to 2019 data from The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), less than 30% of scientific researchers worldwide are women (<https://bit.ly/3qhVQZP>). Women in general may be timid or less aggressive, but our knowledge and experience can be extremely valuable. Female scientists are commonly disregarded for awards and recognition compared with their male counterparts.

It's not just women that are often overlooked. We often fail to notice people of different heritage, race, nationalities, experiences, and backgrounds. It may not be intentional, but as humans, we quickly form habits whether it's the path we take to the office or the scientists we recognize or collaborate with most frequently.

Take a look around your department, college, and professional organizations, and try to find female researchers that could add value to your project or grant. Think outside of the box when possible as to the other researchers you collaborate with on projects and grants. Visit with researchers around you who are of a different gender, race, background, etc., and get to know them and their area of expertise. Request more diversity and inclusion within committees you serve on in your department, your college, and other groups you are a part of.

Despite challenges of gender discrimination and lack of recognition in the scientific community, countless inspiring women in the fields of crop science, agronomy, and soil science have made historic contributions to science and have helped advance our understanding of agriculture and the world. Many were not recognized in their own

lifetimes, but their achievements have helped generations of female scientists to come.

Women in science are foundational, bringing their experience and uniqueness to the table. Forages and women are important players in complex industries. As leaders, it is our responsibility to make sure the next generation of women are educated, encouraged, and empowered to take on the challenges of meeting the world's growing food, fuel, and fiber needs.

Editor's note: This article is part of a series written by members of the Women in Science Committee, for all Society members. For more information, visit

www.agronomy.org/membership/women-in-science,

www.crops.org/membership/women-in-science, and

www.soils.org/membership/women-in-science.

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