

Agronomic Science Foundation

Benefits and Potential Pitfalls of Charitable Giving

The list of charitable causes seem to be endless and the requests for help often come 24 hours a day, seven days a week by telephone, television, through the mail, on the internet—even on billboards. Most of these causes are extremely important, and if you have been reading this column lately, you are probably intimately aware of the challenges we face in feeding the world. So how do you decide where to give your hard-earned dollars?

One way to decide on your charitable giving is to take the time to learn about the organizations who are asking for your money. One of the best ways to do this is to work as a volunteer. When you volunteer your time, you gain first-hand knowledge of the mission of the organization that will help you decide whether it matches your personal philanthropic goals.



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Another way to help you decide on where to give your money is to tap into private watchdog organizations such as GuideStar (www2.guidestar.org) and public ones like the Internal Revenue Service (www.irs.gov), which can help you determine if certain causes that you are unfamiliar with are legitimate. These organizations may also be able to help you find ways to remove yourself from mailing lists that stuff your mailbox with unwanted solicitations.

If you get a phone call from someone representing one of these causes, ask them to send you written information about the organization's revenue, expenses, and programs as well as how your donation will be used. You should also ask for proof that your contribution is tax deductible. Sometimes I do online research with independent resources and then call the charity directly to find out if the organization exists and if it is even aware of the solicitation. One time, my suspicion was confirmed when the official organization was unaware of the soliciting group who was allegedly representing them!

But remember that giving money is not the only way to be charitable. When you volunteer and are generous with your time, many benefits accrue to not only the charity of your choice, but to you as well. According to author Steven Post who wrote *The Hidden Gifts of Helping*, of the 41% of Americans who volunteered in some way last year, 96% say that contributing to others made them feel happier. Post writes, "If you could put that outcome in a bottle and sell it, you'd be a millionaire."

As you have heard me say before, the only way to make a change in the world today—whatever cause you decide to support—is to start with the person you see in the mirror. The Agronomic Science Foundation offers many volunteer opportunities in the Gateway Fund, the Golden Opportunities Scholars Institute, the Pathway Fund, and the traveling soils exhibit—"Dig It! The Secrets of Soil."

For information about options that might interest you, contact me at 608-273-8095 or abarton@sciencesocieties.org.

In Memoriam

Felix Ponder

Dr. Felix Ponder, Jr., research soil scientist with the USDA Forest Service and a member of SSSA and ASA for more than 30 years, died 5 Feb. 2012 in Columbia, MO. Born 7 Oct. 1946, in Brooks County, GA, he was the eldest of six sons. Ponder married Mevelene Meredith the day after their graduation from Fort Valley State University in June 1969. He received a master's degree in soil chemistry from Tuskegee University in 1971 and a Ph.D. in botany from Southern Illinois University in 1978.



Ponder's interest in soils has its roots in the red clay of his family's farm in Georgia as well as his experience in high school when he met like-minded students in New Farmers of America and 4H. As a college student, his focus shifted from agricultural soils to forest soils and their complicated interactions of fungi, bacteria, and other organisms. Ponder began his Forest Service career at Jefferson National Forest in Virginia in 1971 where he worked as a soil scientist for four years before joining the Northern Research Station in Carbondale, IL. His office was subsequently located at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO for more than 18 years, where he also served as the Forest Service project leader of the second research work unit in the nation to be located on the campus of a historically black college or university. His work with students was instrumental in drawing people into natural resource careers.

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