

## Agronomic Science Foundation

# Rediscovering a Time-Tested Tool to Advocate for Soil Health

**H**ave you ever believed in something so much that you wanted to scream it from a mountaintop for the whole world to hear?

While this might work in cartoons, it is not an effective approach in the real world. But recently, I rediscovered a practical way to do this through a familiar media tool that is often overlooked with more trendy options such as social media, videoconferencing, and 3D television. This tool has stood the test of time as a staple in farming communities across the country for decades, and it is now being reinvented via the internet. What is it? Radio! It is still one of the most readily available tools to broadcast information to the public.

People love listening to stories over the radio. For more than a century, it has provided a passive and easy way for the public to learn about new information. Most traditional radio stations have a power output that equates to thousands of watts, which gives listeners far and wide the ability to tune in with a simple receiver. In the past, only large broadcast companies such as CBS had the resources to disseminate information in this way due to the large overhead cost of equipment, energy, and staff that was required. These days, the internet has opened up “radio” broadcasting for many organizations to amplify their message to the masses through podcasts and audio streaming software. This is something the Alliance of Crop, Soil, and Environmental Science Societies (ACSESS) may be looking at in the near future.

I was recently given a special opportunity to represent the Agronomic Science Foundation (ASF) and SSSA on traditional radio through a connection with one of my past professors at the University of Wisconsin–Madison who has a weekly radio show on Wisconsin Public Radio (WPR). It is called *The Larry Meiller Show* and is broadcast live six days a week between the hours of 11 am and 12:45 pm CST. Larry has been a radio host for more than 34 years and is a true professional. He still teaches at the University of Wisconsin–Madison at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and is on many committees that influence student policy and programs.

On 15 May, I was invited to his studio at Vilas Hall on campus in Madison for a



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special segment on soil health. It was an incredible honor to be in the position to represent the donors and members of ASF and SSSA. I felt comfortable being on the radio since I had my own radio show in high school, which gave me the opportunity to interview a wide variety of guests. One piece of advice I will offer

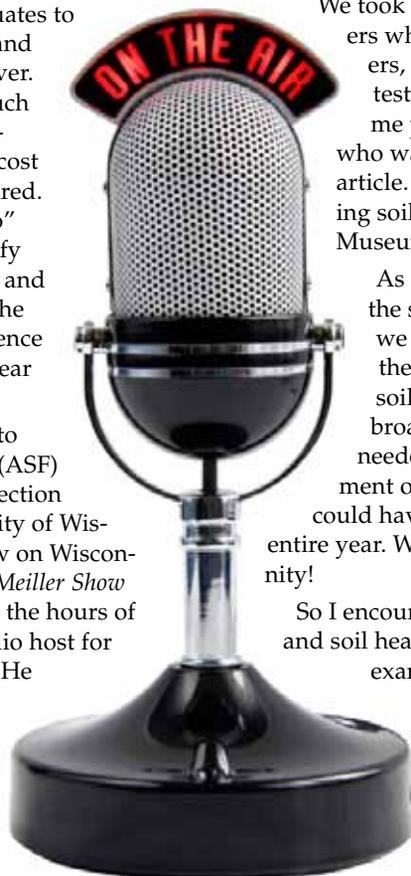
to anyone who might be interviewed on a live radio segment is to not think about the thousands of people listening and just concentrate on the conversation you are having with the host. Larry has a unique ability of putting guests at ease which made our conversation that much easier. From the very beginning, we were laughing and having a great time talking about how soil is made up of many things, but one thing it is not is DIRT!

My fellow guest was Jimmy Bramblett who is the Wisconsin state conservationist from the USDA-NRCS.

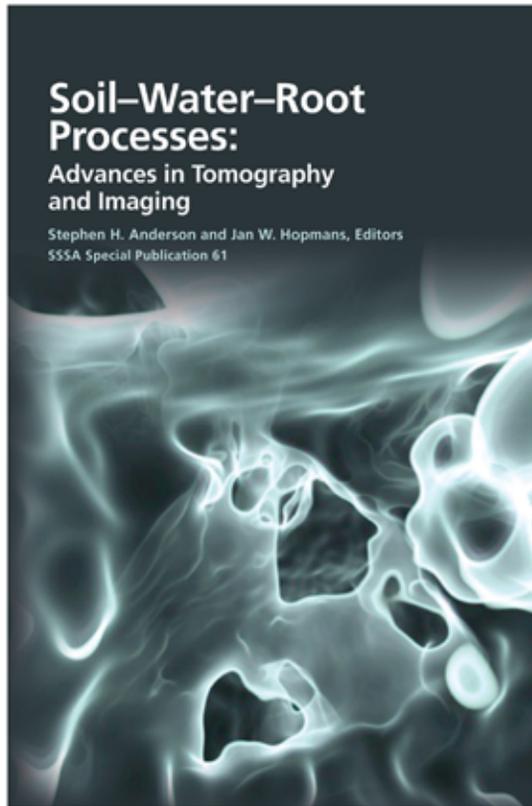
We took turns answering questions from listeners who ranged from farmers, city gardeners, and students who inquired about soil testing, composting, and erosion. It made me proud to mention a fellow SSSA member who was quoted in a recent *New York Times* article. I also made sure to highlight the traveling soils exhibit currently on display at The Bell Museum in Minneapolis.

As we connected with the listeners during the show, I realized the amount of progress we were making with our effort to advocate the public about soils, and in particular, soil health. It happened so quickly and so broadly that it was apparent to me that we needed to do more of it. In the 45-minute segment on WPR, we reached more people than I could have reached traveling the country for an entire year. What a profound broadcasting opportunity!

So I encourage you to become an advocate for soil and soil health in any way which suits you. For example, if you are interested in helping to fund the traveling soils exhibit while exploring other ways to educate the public on this important natural resource, please give me a call at 608-273-8095 to find out how. In the meantime, I'll see you on the radio!



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### Advances in Tomography and Imaging

Stephen H. Anderson and Jan W. Hopmans, Editors  
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