

Agronomic Science Foundation

The New Space Race

When hunter-gatherers first began to settle down and grow grain around 8,000 B.C., the world's population stood at about five million. People farmed for themselves or starved because they didn't. By 1800, when population reached one billion, most people were still closely tied to the land growing their own food. Over the next 200 years, population numbers exploded to just over seven billion—where it stands today—and just one in eight people farm the land.

More than one billion people go hungry today—the vast majority of them are in low-income countries. Population is projected to rise to 9.1 billion by 2050. Before he died in 2009, Dr. Norman Borlaug, father of the Green Revolution, who is credited with saving a billion lives asked, "Where will the food come from?"

Revolutionizing food production across the world could be to the 21st Century what the space race was to the 20th when people really understand that civilization as we know it depends on sustainable agriculture. As America raced for the moon in the 1960s, kids dreamed about becoming astronauts. When today's young people realize that farmers, agronomists, crop scientists, and soil scientists will be the heroes of the 21st Century, they will join the race.

What role do members of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA have in this cause? Not only must they find and promote better ways to grow crops, but they must find and develop the next generation of leaders who will answer the question of how to feed a hungry world.

The widening disconnect between those who grow the food and those who eat it means that the idea of a career in agronomy or a related field just doesn't occur to most young people who have no direct connection to anyone who makes a living from agriculture. But when they understand who these people are, what they do, and how the very civilization of the world depends on them, they may be inspired to enlist in this frontline fight against world hunger.

When Francis Pierce, a past president of ASA, first proposed **Agronomists Making a Difference**, he indicated that the initiative would work through sponsorship of agronomic activities throughout the world such as the support of students in K-12 and higher education; recognition of agronomists who make a difference;



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and documentation and public promotion of notable achievements in agronomy.

Other avenues that will help recruitment efforts are **The Gateway Fund**, which provides funding to those who propose promising novel methods to identify, inspire, and recruit high school, undergraduate, and graduate students; **The Pathway Fund**, which encourages young, energized scientists and professionals to travel widely and offer their scientific expertise in struggling areas around the world; and the **Golden Opportunity Scholars Institute**, which matches undergraduate students currently enrolled in agronomy, crop science, and/or soil science with Society members who serve as mentors for the scholars during the Annual Meetings and beyond to support their educational efforts and career path.

The future leaders who are inspired to join the leaders of today in this quest to ensure the world food supply and food security for the 21st Century will take agriculture to next level. The result will be a sufficient food supply to keep pace with the burgeoning world population.

Please consider helping to find these future leaders with your time and/or financial resources. For more information about becoming a mentor or scholar, contact Emily Fuger at efuger@sciencesocieties.org or 608-268-4949. For more information on how to donate, contact Alexander Barton at abarton@sciencesocieties.org or 608-273-8095.

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