

Agronomic Science Foundation

You Can Make a Difference

Once upon a time, most Americans lived close to the land on their own farms where they grew their own food. They could walk out the door and see the crops growing in their fields and look forward to the harvest as long as the weather held. Today, when most people in America think about the food supply, they think of the produce section at their local grocery store.

However, this year's drought has increased public awareness of the tenuousness of our food supply and how it is related to weather and agricultural practices. While the situation has caused much hardship, the silver lining in the drought this year in America may actually be that the shortages and possible crop failures have become front page news. Beyond the news, Americans will certainly be affected by the higher prices at the grocery store. But in underdeveloped nations, the stakes are a little higher—crop failures result in malnutrition. Malnutrition affects 195 million children worldwide and is the underlying cause of at least one-third of the eight million annual deaths of children under five years of age. It can also cause stunting, cognitive impairment, and lead to greater susceptibility to disease.

Members of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are the frontline warriors in this fight for a civilization where all people may one day be free of malnutrition and the diseases that it causes. Agriculture after all was the foundation of civilization. Nomadic people first settled in the Fertile Crescent to grow grain. While international food aid can help, most consists of nutritionally inadequate fortified corn-soy flours that do not provide the nutrients young children need the most. The best way to make a real difference is to work on food production at its most basic level—on the lands of individual farmers.



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Ways to Get Involved

In an initiative called **Agronomists Making a Difference**, first reported in the March 2010 issue of the *CSA News* magazine, Francis Pierce, then president of ASA, outlined the concept of the new program. "The idea is simple—create a forum for our members, constituents, and stakeholders to report to the world examples of agronomists making a difference." As Dr. Pierce suggested when he first proposed Agronomists Making a Difference, the initiative could "be supported through sponsorship of agronomic activities throughout the world; support of students in K-12 and higher education to make a difference; recognition of agronomists who make a difference; and documentation and public promotion of notable achievements in agronomy."

Other avenues open to our members to make a difference include **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, and/or soil sciences with Society members who serve as mentors for the scholars during the Annual Meetings and beyond to support their educational efforts and career path.

Please consider making a difference with your time and/or financial resources. For more information about becoming a mentor or scholar, contact Emily Fuger at 608-268-4949 or efuger@sciencesocieties.org or. For more information on how to donate, contact me at 608-273-8095 or abarton@sciencesocieties.org.



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